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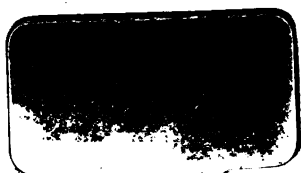
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THE SECRET OF TWO HOUSES.

THE SECRET OF TWO HOUSES.

A Nobel.

By FANNY FISHER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

SAMUEL TINSLEY, 10, SOUTHAMPTON ST., STRAND.

1873.

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D E D I C A T E D,

BY PERMISSION,

TO

HER EXCELLENCY THE COUNTESS SPENCER,

IN ADMIRATION OF HER AMIABILITY, AND AS A

TOKEN OF THE HIGH ESTEEM IN WHICH SHE IS HELD

BY THE LADIES OF IRELAND.

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THE SECRET OF TWO HOUSES.

CHAPTER I.

THE CASTLE.

UNDER the sheltering branches of a fine old chestnut tree, a group of ladies made as pleasant a picture as any artist need wish to look at. The rays of the burning sun could not penetrate into their leafy bower; and although the demesne of Castlethomond was replete with attractions of every sort, there were none so inviting just then as the group in the cool shade of that old tree.

Three girls had taken off their hats to let the slight breeze play refreshingly over their fair foreheads, thus displaying three of the sweetest faces imaginable; but the sweetest and the fairest belonged to Lady Ada Gray-

ston, the only one present who was not a guest at the Castle, for the simple reason that her parents owned the large manor-house whose roof she could see from where she sat.

The Desmonds and the Graystons had been, until lately, on the intimate terms which is so agreeable to near neighbours; and there were few mornings which did not bring the lively Ada to the Castle for the purpose of cheering Mrs. Desmond, who was a confirmed invalid; but those visits ceased abruptly, and the sufferer missed the kindly voice which had always made music in her heart. Once she remonstrated with the young girl for this falling off of the intercourse between the two families; but Ada's confusion was so painful, and the Desmond pride so unbending, that the subject was never again alluded to.

Those who had known of this intimacy and seeing its falling away, gave a pretty fair guess as to its cause.

Lord Grayston withdrew his daughter from the dangerous fascination of Mrs. Desmond's three sons, although to the eldest even his lordship could have found no objection, had

he not suspected that the heart of the heir was safely captured in another quarter.

Thus Lady Ada's visits to the Castle were, like angel's visits now, few and far between, and, like an angel's, they were always hailed with gladness. This morning she was there almost by stratagem, having obtained permission on the plea of some of her London friends being there, which was simply the truth; and having received a warm welcome from them, she sat with her hat off under the old chestnut, asking and answering a hundred questions.

A vacant chair stood right in the centre of the little group—a low, comfortable-looking one, that would have been irresistible on a winter's day, but which now looked unpleasantly warm, with its numerous cushions and pillows, which are the sure paraphernalia of an invalid. Those had been arranged and re-arranged, while anxious glances were directed towards the Castle; but she for whom the chair was waiting had not yet made her appearance.

It was a novel thing to see the young and gay display so much interest in an invalid; but Mrs. Desmond was an exceptional one,

and one for whom the gayest and the youngest would at all times gladly resign any frivolous pleasure for the truer pleasure of serving her. She was a favourite with all, respected by rich and poor alike, and loved most dearly by those who knew her best; yet for months before her husband's death, which occurred some half-dozen years ago, she was the patient, uncomplaining victim of ill health.

At last there was a sign of life on the broad steps; a servant came out and stood on one side, while Mrs. Desmond, leaning on the arm of her eldest son, walked slowly past him. The little group under the trees watched the advancing figures with deep interest, until they came sufficiently near for the girls to rise and wait for the invalid to take her place amongst them.

Ada was the only one who advanced a few steps to meet Mrs. Desmond. This she did in a timid, hesitating manner; but after one glance at the familiar face, her timidity melted like snow before the sunshine, and she was clasped in a warm embrace, with a welcome as hearty as though there had never been any coldness between them.

"We were beginning to despair of you," pleasantly remarked one of the girls.

"We were afraid the day was too hot for you to venture out," added another. And so on, each adroitly slipping in her mite of sympathy or interest, in order to give the invalid breathing time after her walk of about a dozen perches. But Mrs. Desmond was not always as weak and ill as she was to-day, for a more severe attack of the disease that was killing her left her unusually prostrate. However, she was not one to curb the pleasure of those around her by her own sufferings.

Jealous that any one should render his mother the slightest assistance while he was present, Walter arranged the pillows for her in as comfortable a manner as possible, and having waited till the ladies resumed their places, he threw himself carelessly on the grass before them.

"This is much more beneficial and pleasant than within doors," he said, following Ada's example in taking off his hat, but in nothing else, for he ran his fingers through the rich masses of his hair, and ruffled it up, in a manner that she would highly disapprove.

of for herself, although secretly admitting that his fine features would bear any freak of fashion, however absurd.

"Suppose you read to us."

"From what?"

"Byron."

"No, Tennyson."

"Oh, pray let it be Moore!"

"Have mercy ladies. Where are the volumes to come from, if I am to satisfy you all?"

"You can run off to the library and fetch them."

"Run off in that burning sun; indeed, you are much too modest. No, no; that would be taxing the politeness of a Chesterfield. Besides, reading poetry under such circumstances would be horribly romantic, and I am of a matter-of-fact turn of mind. Suppose we talk scandal?"

"Execrable!"

"Oh, so shocking!"

"Barbarous!"

"Talking of poetry," broke in the gentle voice of Mrs. Desmond, "where are those verses you read to me last evening?"

"In Lynmore's pocket, I suppose, mother.

He takes such an interest in the fair authoress, that I can assure you it was with the very greatest difficulty I got him to lend them at all. However, as they are shortly to appear in a monthly magazine, every one will have an opportunity of admiring them as well as you."

"And who might the fair authoress be?"

"Moila M'Dermott."

"Impossible! You cannot mean the farmer's daughter?"

"Indeed I do, Miss Beresby."

"Surely her education would not fit her for such an ordeal as to come before the critics of the present day?"

"Her education is perfect, if that were necessary for a poet, which it is not, else Burns and many others whom I could name never would have become famous. Poetry, like refinement, is a gift of Nature, which education can improve, but never give."

"Then you mean to say that Nature has her pets, and that this low-born girl is one of them. Surely, Mr. Desmond, you cannot imagine that such common people as the M'Dermotts have one particle of refinement in them?"

“Have you ever seen Moila or Dorina?” asked Lady Ada, quietly.

“Never. Rustic beauties, I suppose, with an artificial show of English and music, which passes for the genuine article. And is this your poetess, Mrs. Desmond, a petty farmer’s daughter?”

“A refined and intellectual girl,” said the invalid. “One who would grace any station, and yet who is not one whit superior to her sister in mind, manner, or appearance.”

“Then the other one is clever also?”

“Yes; much more so than Moila, though in a different way. But as Dorina is my favourite, I fear I am scarcely an impartial judge.”

Mrs. Desmond leaned back on her pillows as she thus spoke, and for the time took no further part in the conversation.

“Moila is my favourite, then,” said Lady Ada, warmly. “To my mind, she is worth a hundred Dorinas. So talented, yet so unpretending; so proud, yet so humble; so lovely, yet so unconscious of it; so lady-like—”

“Oh, in mercy spare us the catalogue of your *protégée’s* virtues!”

"She is no *protégée* of mine," Miss Beresby.

"Indeed? I thought she must be so, since you were so anxious to extol her. But as for being lady-like, come now, confess you went too far."

"To say I did so, would be speaking falsely. The M'Dermotts are the most lady-like girls I know."

"Thank you for the compliment and the hint. Where are those paragons to be found?"

"At Rosmary Farm. About half a mile from this, or even less than that across the fields. But I scarcely think you would find them both at home now, for I met Dorina going to Clonshavale as I came here."

"Clonshavale? You do not mean to tell me that Miss Sarsfield would receive a farmer's daughter on any terms of intimacy?"

"Indeed I do. Sir Capel Sarsfield's niece and Dorina M'Dermott are the very best of friends, as much so as Moila and myself."

"Do those girls go to your balls, your fêtes, your dinners, or to any other of your fashionable gatherings?"

"Well, no," admitted Ada, reluctantly.

"I thought so. It is all very well to make

free with those sort of people in secret; you would do the same with your waiting-maid, though I should not say it before Mr. Desmond."

"My mother has them frequently here," he remarked.

"Here, at the Castle? I never. But it must be when you are quite alone?"

"No, indeed, when we have some of our oldest and most intimate friends staying with us."

"Well, they might not mind it through friendship for your mother."

"And they have always been charmed with the farmer's daughters."

Mrs. Desmond leaned forward now, and asked,—

"Is there not as much difference in the grades of human nature as there is in the grades of position? Surely refinement is innate—is born as often with the peasant as with the king. Ah! I have seen the highest stoop to deeds with which the lowest would scorn to meddle, and *vice versa*. No, no; it is not because we are placed in a sphere above the M'Dermotts that we are morally their superiors. Their father spared no ex-

pense on their education, but they possessed the groundwork already. The gifts with which they were endowed were not made, but were beautified and perfected by right teaching."

"One, to hear you talk, would scarcely believe that you were a descendant from a long line of noble ancestors," replied Miss Beresby, with a mocking laugh. "But positively you make me quite curious to see these girls. Are you not afraid though that your sons may imbibe your own views, Mrs. Desmond? Of course, I do not mean Erroll, who, every one knows, is deeply smitten with Miss Sarsfield."

The words were lightly spoken, but they affected the invalid more than the occasion seemed to warrant. She fell back on her pillows with her eyes rivetted on the speaker's face, and her trembling lips moving with the two words—"Miss Sarsfield?"

"I hope I have not said anything amiss?" said the surprised Miss Beresby.

"Certainly not, my dear; let it pass and be forgotten. The day, I think, is not quite so hot now. What do you all say to an excursion?"

"Oh, how delightful," chorused the young voices, as, acting on the suggestion, the girls were on their feet in a moment, Ada excepted. She had contrived to whisper a petition to stay behind; but, ever unselfish, the invalid would not allow it.

"I suppose we could all fit in two carriages; that is, if Erroll or Lynmore do not join us?" said Walter. "But where shall we go to? Doonass, Clare Glen, or—"

"No, no; pray let our excursion be to the farm. I forget its name."

"Rosmary."

"Yes. Let us go to Rosmary Farm, and see those wonderful girls. Do not get carriages, for we can walk, if it be only the distance Lady Ada says. Or, what do you say if we go on horseback? Would it not be an imposing sight for the farmer's daughters? Lady Ada is demurring because she has not her habit, but we shall find one for her. Shall it be so?"

"Yes; agreed, agreed."

This chorus was quite as loud as the former one, but not one of those gay creatures stirred until Mrs. Desmond was nearly at the Castle steps; then they followed—some discussing

the subject of Moila's poem, and others wondering what made the invalid look so strange when Miss Beresby spoke of Miss Sarsfield as being the loadstar of Erroll's heart.

"I have always noticed that she shrinks from the mention of Mildred's name in connexion with one of her children," said one confidential friend to another.

"It is, indeed, queer, such a nice girl as Miss Sarsfield is. And now that you put me in mind of it, I remember a little incident which occurred the other day. I did not think much of it then, but now I see it in a different light. However, first tell me which of Mrs. Desmond's sons you most prefer—Walter, Erroll, or Lynmore?"

"Erroll, of course."

"So do I. But is it not a pity that he is only the second son?"

"Yes; if he were the heir, we all should like him better. He is the handsomest young man I ever saw."

"A perfect Adonis."

"And so dreadfully fascinating."

"Yes. Ah, me! But go on about the incident."

"Well, Mrs. Desmond and I were walking

in the garden, when who should we see but Mildred Sarsfield and Erroll Desmond in a little arbour, having a very quiet *tête-à-tête*."

"And what harm was that?"

"None, I thought; but the young gentleman's mother did not seem to agree with my private opinion; for she caught my arm as if in a vice, and trembled so that I could scarcely support her, on seeing those two together."

"Now, if it had been one of those farming girls, I would not wonder; but Mildred is unexceptionable. Was he making love to her?"

"I suspect as much, for he was bending very earnestly towards her until we came up; then he became a little confused, and tried to carry it off with a high hand. From many trifling things I have lately observed, I have come to the conclusion that Mrs. Desmond, although one of the best of women, is capable of a very bitter hatred towards Milly Sarsfield. But let us hasten on, for Mr. Desmond has gone round to the stables to order the horses."

"Yes, I shall hurry, for I was never so anxious to see any sight as I am now to see

those farming girls. Vulgar, purse-proud creatures we are sure to find them, particularly this poetess. What is her name, do they say?"

"Moila; the other is Dorina."

"Pretty names. Which is the elder?"

"Dorina."

"Which the more clever?"

"Dorina."

"Which the more beautiful?"

"Dorina. In fact, if you ask thus for comparisons between the two sisters, I could but answer until morning—Dorina."

CHAPTER II.

THE FARM.

No monarch standing on the highest pinnacle of pomp and power could have felt a prouder man than Farmer M'Dermott, as he stood on an old harrow to contemplate the ripe grain of harvest spreading broadly over his farm. He was a hearty, hale old man, with an honest weather-beaten face; but it was a face you could trust in spite of wind or weather: and looking at him thus, with his grey locks caressed by the smoke which issued from an old clay-pipe he held in his mouth, he was the very picture of contentment.

Ireland had this year been prosperous in her crops; and Mr. M'Dermott, looking upon his corn-fields with the eye of a connoisseur, calculated to a nicety the number of sackfulls that soon would be gathered to his granary; and not being a poet, although having the

good taste to admire the prospect before him, he felt a keener enjoyment in its worth than in its beauty.

Having finished his smoke, and being fully satisfied with the inspection of his property, M'Dermott clasped his hands behind his back, and walked leisurely into the house, where we shall not follow him just now, as there is more to be seen outside.

The mellow plumes of wheat, waving to and fro, caught the rare breeze, and fan-like wafted it over the cheeks of a young girl, who leant against a haystack in apparent contemplation of their graceful motion. Beautiful Dorina M'Dermott looked on her father's fields with eyes that saw them not; yet she was not blind—far from it: those glorious orbs, so deep in their azure light, sparkled with too keen a vivacity for that. But her thoughts were not with the rural scene; they were so deeply entangled in the mazes of a day-dream, that she was unconscious of all beside.

She did not look her best at this moment, therefore it is scarcely fair to introduce her. However, admiration for her beauty might well tempt the most fastidious observer to

glance tenderly over the cloud that now mars its brightness.

A gipsy hat, gaily decorated with wheat-ears and cornflowers, lay at her feet, while she leant against the hay like a beautiful but naughty child. Even the thoughts which darkened her fair brow could not much impair the loveliness of that youthful face, with its dark eyes and rosy mouth, its quick expression, and pouting pertness. Dorina was beautiful despite the passionate compression of her lips, or the haughty gesture which sent the blood flushing over her features, to leave them as pale as a marble statue's when it receded.

Beautiful she was, but there was nothing soft or tender about her, as thus she stood in the brilliant noon-day sun, regardless of the hot rays that fell on her uncovered head, and caught the rich tints which sparkled like burnished gold through the rippling masses of her hair. No, nothing soft or tender, for anger and discontent were the two feelings which distorted the sweet charms of womanhood, and made her beauty almost repellent for the time. Such, however, was not her general demeanour; her manner could be either as

artless as a child's or as dignified as a queen's, according as the humour suited her. But in every mood she was as warm-hearted and true as she was fascinating and coquettish.

For miles round Rosmary Farm she was known as "The Red Rose of the Vale," while her sister Moila was equally popular as "The Sweet Rose of the Vale." The simple difference of the one word was a sure index, not only to the character of both, but to the estimation in which they were held. The elder and more brilliant Dorina was admired where the softer and more amiable Moila was beloved.

A peal of merry laughter roused Dorina at last from her reverie; and as it echoed near her from the fields beyond, she flushed with a deeper anger, and shivered as with cold in the hot sunshine. Yet all unconscious of its tones being unwelcome, the fresh young voice rang out in its glee, filling the air with music, and making the eyes of old Farmer M'Dermott dance between his grey locks with a wonderful appreciation of its infectious gladness.

Not many perches from Dorina, a man, crouching in the corn, watched her with the

eye of a lynx, as she stood shuddering at the innocent gaiety of her sister. Nearer, and still nearer, came the laughter, until a sight burst upon her which she seemed unable to bear, for she walked quickly away as it advanced.

Yet the vision was not one to flee from; it was a simple girl, in the first bloom of womanhood, endeavouring, with all her might, to free herself from a ribbon that was fastened round the neck of a young goat. But the pet, being obstreperous, ran round her feet, and entangled her more and more, as it seemed, for the purpose of enjoying the very merriment which was repugnant to her sister.

The man who was hid in the corn watched Dorina until she entered the house; then he rose, and, shaking himself like a great mastiff, stood out in the sun laughing, as the goat pulled the maiden close beside him.

It would be difficult to tell what manner of man was this. At one time he seemed old and worn out; at another, a youth full of fire and energy; but at all seasons he was unsightly and mysterious, sullen of temper, and silent and cunning by nature. No one seemed

to care for Toby Downs but one, and that one was his friend, his benefactress, his guardian angel and ruler, simple Moila M'Dermott.

For Moila, the poor foundling, would lay down his almost worthless life, if in the slightest it could serve her. To her he was humble and submissive as a slave, although fierce and defiant to every one else on the farm, even to Mr. M'Dermott, who had taken him through charity when a child, and detained him through charity as a man, and a very useless member of society.

Moila's goat grew quiet at last, and rubbed its head against the white folds of her dress, as if seeking forgiveness, until she caressed it. It was a wise little animal, and something in its eyes attracted her so much that she was seldom weary of gazing into them. Toby looked now upon the girl as thus she fondled her favourite, and thought that nothing so sweetly beautiful had ever filled his sight before; yet he was accustomed to see her thus; but at that moment a tenderness filled his breast, which deprived him of all self-control; for, with an impulse he could not conquer, and of which he was

scarcely conscious, he flung himself beside the goat, and caught the little hand that lay upon its back.

"Aroon!" he cried. "Miss Moila, aroon! Pray heaven that you may be like this always."

She was startled, and drew back; but he retained her hand, and bent over it until she felt his tears upon it.

"What is the matter now, Toby? Who has hurt or vexed you?" She touched the bristly unkempt head with the other hand as she asked the questions.

"None, Miss Moila. 'Taint o' myself I think; but just a dhrame I had last night about you; an' 'tis a hauntin' o' me still, and troublin' me entirely."

She withdrew her hands impatiently.

"Did I not often tell you that this kind of thing is superstition?—and now I forbid you to speak about your dreams or any such nonsense again."

"But this was a queer dhrame, Miss, with such queer people in it, all a wantin' to do you some hurt. Even Mr. Lynmore Desmond thried his best agin you."

A quick upward glance from under his

dark lashes flashed on Moila's crimson face, but, apparently unconscious, he went on,—

“And oh, machree! the dread lies on my heart for you; and niver a minnet passes but I look for the evil that may change you from what you are, that may bring a sorrow to your life, and a death-shroud to them as loves you.”

“Banish this folly at once and for ever. Do you remember that the time is fast approaching for the harvest-home, Toby?”

“Yes, miss, I remember the harvest-home. Curse it!”

“Toby!”

Moila uttered the one word and he was rebuked in an instant. Then the goat, evidently understanding that its mistress was not pleased, ran round her feet, and tore at her dress, until she was so entangled in the ribbons again, that Toby had to come to the rescue; then she bounded away with her dumb companion, as gaily as the bird which thought not of the morrow.

The man gazed after her until she vanished as she had appeared, the sweetest thing that he had ever looked upon; then he passed his hands lightly over the corn, muttering,—

“’Tis deeper the danger gets, but Toby Downs is watching; and Miss Dorina, she’s the worst to manage, for she’s so proud and hard to speak to. The harvest-home—curse it! Why should I not curse it? I will, and do curse it!”

CHAPTER III.

DORINA.

To escape the joyous tones of her sister's voice, Dorina sought her own apartment, and drew the bolt of its door, as though to shut out the unwelcome sounds; yet she hated herself for hating that innocent gaiety, and did fierce battle with her heart for its obduracy.

Why should Moila not be happy, and why should Dorina not be happy likewise? Each had their several advantages, and there was no difference in the parental treatment of either to cause that jealousy which too often spreads the chasm between the parent and the child.

The M'Dermotts were what might safely be termed a small family, being only four in number, that is, independently of the nume-

rous cousins, aunts, uncles, &c., which clustered in groups, or spread here and there and everywhere over Irish soil, from county to county, until the race could be traced back to Brian Borhoime, or, in fact, to Noah before the Flood. However, as the M'Dermott greatness has only to show itself in those four, we have nothing whatever to do with the dead ancestors—so let them rest in peace.

Those four are respectable, well-educated people, although not belonging to what is called the farming gentry: they were humble folk, scarcely even of the middle class; but a true type of their style. Surely the blunt good-nature of the old farmer, and the true but vulgar kindness of the wife, were counter-balanced by the beauty and refinement of their children, who were living proofs that high birth is not always essential for the modelling of Nature's nobility.

Dorina bolted her door and flung her hat upon the bed with a violence that might have impaired the elegance of even a Dolly Varden, had not the elegance of that sublime fashion been proof against rebuffs of every kind. However, she flung her hat on the

bed, and seated herself at the window, to gaze upon the bounteous gifts which were showered upon ungrateful humanity; not that she thought much about those gifts just then, for she sat there watching the goat drag Moila along, and listening to her laughter, with an angry frown; she saw Toby bend over her sister's hand and smiled bitterly, while the patting of her pretty foot bespoke impatience,—she saw the yellow corn, the verdant hills of Clare, the broad breast of the Shannon, and yet she turned from all to gaze upon the chimney-tops of Clonshavale, that reared themselves far out in the distance against the azure calm of the summer sky.

“Shall I go to Sir Capel and tell him the whole truth?” she murmured, with her eyes fixed longingly in the direction of the old manor. “What would he say, what would he think? Call me a fool, perhaps, and read me a lecture for my improvement. Tell my godfather? Dorina confess her madness even to him? No, no, no! He thinks her faultless now, let him think so still.”

A footfall drew her attention to the gravel-walk beneath, and on looking down she saw Toby beckoning to her. She was by his

side in a moment, and they walked leisurely into the cornfields; then she stood and looked keenly at him.

"You want to know the reason I disturbed you, miss?" he began, reading her look and her countenance alike.

"Yes. Why did you do so?"

"Because I saw a party leave the Castle steps just now, and Mr. Lynmore is among them."

"And what of that? Why are you hesitating? Tell me what you want, and no more."

Her breast heaved with impatience, and she waited for him to speak again. But he stood hesitating still, with his eyes rivetted on her face, and his hands twitching nervously at the buttons of his coat.

"What are you staring at?" she asked, laughing now at his awkwardness. "One would fancy that by studying my face you were trying to find out my secret thoughts."

"'Twouldn't be hard to do that same neither, miss, seeing as how I know so much o' them already. But with regards to Masther Lynmore and the other gents at the Castle, I was a goin' to say that—that as Miss Moila—"

"You take too much trouble about Miss Moila. Were it not that you would not dare to do so, I could almost say you loved her."

"And where is the man or woman that doesn't love her, barrin' yourself, Miss Dorah?"

"I?"

"Jist yourself. Didn't I see you run away as if you hated the very looks o' her? Don't I remember what you confessed in the barn on Midsummer's Day, when I caught you a cryin' and wringin' o' your hands like a banshee, because Masther Lynmore stood beyond wid your sister, speakin' to her in the garden? Didn't you tell me thin as how the love o' your heart was all a wastin' on the man who didn't care a thraneen for you? And now, Miss Dorah, I'm goin' to give you a bit of advice. You mustn't thry to come between Miss Moila and her lover, as that I think Mr. Lynmore is, for I'll be a watchin' on you to prevent a mischief that way."

"Dorina had shrunk from Toby as he spoke of her confession; but when he mentioned Lynmore in connexion with her

sister's name, she uttered a cry so fierce, that he almost regretted what he had said. However, he thought it was for the best, and the pangs which rent her breast were almost as keenly felt by the heart that beat in his own humble bosom.

"Toby Downs," she said, in a hard, dry voice, "I did confess that hateful weakness to you, and you will keep my secret. But you are wrong to say I do not love my sister; I do, I do, indeed. She is what every one must love—so good, so true, so beautiful; but her very unconsciousness of Mr. Lynmore's admiration, or whatever else he feels for her, drives me to desperation. She is such a child, and yet I am only one year older; but, ah! how different we are, because of our different natures. She is all tenderness—gentle, soft, and loving; I all passion—fierce, jealous, and revengeful. She is an angel; I am but a woman, and full of woman's weakness."

"A cuishla," murmured Toby, soothingly; and with such a pathos of pity in his tones, that although the girl scarcely knew the literal meaning of the words, she buried her face in her hands and wept. But it was only

for a moment; the next she raised it, and said, half-laughing, half-recklessly,—

“Well, we are of the one stock, Miss Moila and I; but the same stalk often bears a rotten branch beside the fruitful one. What’s the best to be done with it, Toby, cut it off?”

An expression of deep cunning came into the foundling’s face as he replied,—

“No, but watch and tend it, for it mayn’t be bad at the core.”

“And the green leaves may come upon it when least expected? That is what you mean, Toby? But that would never be; better break the branch and thrust it into the fire; either that, or let it grow its own way. But, look out; who are those people riding in the distance?”

“The party from the Castle, and coming this way, sure enough, Miss Dorah.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE PARTY FROM THE CASTLE.

THE equestrians came leisurely towards the spot where Dorina stood, unwilling to withdraw her eyes from a figure which rode a little in advance; and there was an easy grace about that figure, an elegance of refinement, that might have impressed a less impressionable nature than hers with admiration and respect. When the gay cavalcade drew nearer, the foremost gentleman took off his hat, with a bow and a smile that made the poor girl's heart throb so loud and fast, that she fancied Toby should have heard it, had not that respectable individual taken himself off, after a tug at his forelock, which was meant for a salutation to the party.

But the young gentleman had neither seen the salute nor the frown which accompanied it, and which made Toby's face more

repellent than ever in its ugliness. Lynmore only saw the beautiful girl who stood watching his approach, and marked only the likeness she bore to one whom he thought a still more beautiful girl, because he liked her better.

"Good day, Miss M'Dermott," he said, dismounting, and bending over her hand with natural courtesy. "You see we have taken Rosmary by storm, for which I must crave your pardon."

"We are always glad when strangers think the farm worth a visit, sir. You and your friends are quite welcome, I assure you."

Dorina had addressed herself partly to the ladies, who, by this time, formed a pretty group around her, and who looked upon the humble Irish girl with infinite wonder at the grace and self-possession of her demeanour.

"Let me introduce my friends, Miss Dorina," said Lynmore. "Lady Hamilton. Lady Ada, shall I assist you to dismount? Sir William, Lord Loftus." And so the young man went round his aristocratic friends, until the whole party found themselves on the ground, laughing with and

chatting to the farmer's daughter as though she were one of themselves.

It was a pleasant party. There were Lynmore and his two brothers: Walter, the eldest, a noble but delicate looking man of six-and-twenty, beloved and respected by all his tenantry; Erroll, the second, was two years his junior, and was a wonderfully handsome young fellow, although weary of everything in the world except Dorina M'Dermott. Lynmore, the general favourite, had the misfortune to come last into the world, so, of course, was looked upon as a cipher in the matrimonial market; yet there was many a noble dame who preferred him to the heir, although his coffers were not so rich as his personal attractions.

As the gay party walked towards the house, a blue ribbon flashed before them, then the flutter of some white drapery, and Moila sprang out from the corn, with a pretty blush on her fair face and a glad light in the eyes that glanced coyly from under her broad-leaved hat.

"The Sweet Rose of the Vale," said Mr. Desmond, hastening forward, and greeting the girl with evident pleasure.

"The sweet, but not the sweetest," whispered Erroll to Dorina, as, with a mischievous playfulness, he caught her hand for a second, and gazed on it with as much admiration as if it had been covered with the rarest jewels.

They were then joined by the farmer, and welcomed to Rosmary in a style peculiarly Irish. The ladies were received with a deep salutation, with a separate assurance of the happiness their presence gave him, while the gentlemen's fingers were wrung with a heartiness that almost squeezed them into jelly.

Mr. M'Dermott was very proud of his well-stocked farm, and what farmer is not? He took great trouble in explaining the use of several agricultural implements, all of which were quite as much a mystery after that explanation as before it. However, the party inspected everything worth inspecting, and expressed wonderful interest on what was a wonderful bore to them, even persistently admiring the newest arrival, a litter of bonniffs, of which the parent pigs seemed quite as proud as the farmer himself. Then they passed through the garden, and declared

there was nothing finer at the Castle; at which the farmer chuckled, knowing that a real surprise awaited them.

That surprise consisted of a fern grotto, which was a short distance from the house; but it was worth the walk, even in the hot sunshine, particularly as the walk was not only enlivened by pleasant company, but was beautiful in itself; for, as far as the eye could reach, the fields were clothed in the richest garb of cultivation, and the hills of Clare, with their varying tints of green and purple, seemed to smile up at the gilded clouds, which hung like a gossamer canopy above them. There was nothing bold or rugged, perhaps even picturesque, in the scene, yet the little party admired it, and voted that the view surpassed anything at the Castle.

"Rosmary has certainly one advantage over us," said Erroll Desmond. "Those horrid cabins which dot the country around us seem not to have come so close to this place."

"You have not much in that way to complain of, sir," returned M'Dermott; "there are but few Irish huts to hurt any polished tastes now-a-days."

"What do you call the cluster that still stands not more than half a mile from the Castle gate? If I were in my brother's place, I would have had them razed to the ground long ago."

"They are the miserable homes of the quarry-men—poor, small, and comfortless, which in winter time are but a scant shelter for their squalid families; yet what would they do without them?"

"Well, but I would have them removed, for all that."

"Better have them newly built, or rather build good dwellings in their stead," said Walter Desmond, quietly.

"You surely would not spoil your property, Walter, by doing such a thing as that?"

An exclamation of surprise prevented any answer. Those who were strangers there, had come upon the fern grotto unawares, and stood in speechless admiration of it, as, indeed, they well might do, for it was intensely beautiful, cool, pleasant, and inviting. An archway of granite, rude and glittering, was festooned with trails of various coloured creepers, moss and ivy. It was simply an octagon room, cut out of a huge

rock, more by nature than by art, whose pointed gables protruded through ferns, underwood, and moss. Moss was everywhere, over walls, roof, and floor, until it crept out of the opposite archway, which was as beautiful as the entrance.

Into the fern grotto the ladies went out of the hot sunshine. The place was cool, fresh, and perfumed with the wild plants of nature, where nothing could be heard but a few tiny streams rippling through their mossy beds. It was declared to be enchanting; and after much praise being bestowed upon it, the guests consented to adjourn to the house, where Mrs. M'Dermott was waiting to receive them, with as much unconsciousness as though she had not known they were at Rosmary for the last hour, and had never made any bustle about the house for their reception.

She was standing on the steps, in all the glory of a white cap and pink ribbons, as they came up, and looking a very comely farmer's wife, even to her fastidious visitors.

"Oh, Mrs. M'Dermott," cried Lady Ada, running forward the instant she saw those pink ribbons fluttering their merry welcome;

"all those London folk are so delighted with the grotto; and," whispering, "delighted, too, with Moila and Dorina."

"So like your kind self to say so, my lady. How is my Lord Grayston?"

"Well, thanks. Why have you not come over to the Manor this long while? Remember, I shall expect you soon. Do you see that tall lady walking beside Mr. Desmond? Well, that is Miss Beresby, a very fashionable young lady, who has fallen quite in love with both your daughters."

The pink ribbons fluttered with more delighted excitement than ever; and after an introduction, in which there was no restraint, they all went into the house, and into the state drawing-room, where, of course, everything was in apple-pie order, and where many elegant nicknacks told of the refined taste of the youngest generation of the M'Dermotts.

It was a large, square-built house, commodious and comfortable in the extreme; but the drawing-room was prim and stiff, even to the spider-leg chairs. However, in this apartment the guests made themselves happy, and partook of the good cheer, over which

Mrs. M'Dermott presided with overpowering hospitality; and the whole party left Rosmary at last, thoroughly satisfied with their visit.

"What bright young creatures they are," said Lady Hamilton, on their return to the Castle. "And so beautiful, particularly the girl Dorina."

"Where did they get their manners?" languidly broke in Miss Beresby. "Certainly not from their parents, vulgar creatures that they are."

"Lynmore seemed particularly struck with Moila; indeed, for girls in their position, I fear it is a terrible misfortune to be handsome. Did you remark how attentive he was about the flowers?"

"After seeing Lady Ada home, Lynmore became a different man. I always thought he was in love with her, but I am beginning to believe now that I was mistaken, and that Moila M'Dermott is the lucky girl." This speech was made by the Hon. Miss Hamilton, who got a snubbing for it.

"What of that, my dear? Lynmore is a poor man, and if he likes to fall in love with a low-born girl like that, it is scarcely of any

consequence. However, for his family's sake, of course he could not marry her."

"No, that is a comfort."

"Laura!"

"Mamma."

"You should not express yourself in such a way, child. What does it signify to you about Lynmore?"

"Nothing. Oh, nothing, of course."

Yet the honourable young lady went to look over her sketch-book, which contained sundry drawings, each bearing a bad likeness to the face of the man who was nothing to her.

Mrs. Desmond, who was at present too much of an invalid to be able for much outdoor exercise, had not accompanied her guests to Rosmary Farm. She entered the room as Lady Hamilton rebuked her daughter; and as she heard that young lady's reply, a smile lighted up her countenance; knowing, as she did, how very much her son was to the girl who disclaimed all interest in him. It would be a splendid match for her youngest and best-loved child, as Laura Hamilton was an heiress, and a really charming girl.

"Laura thinks that Lynmore is at last wounded by capricious Cupid," said Lady Hamilton, as Mrs. Desmond took her accustomed seat.

"Indeed!" was the quiet reply. "Perhaps she has good reason to think so."

Laura blushed scarlet, and shook her head by way of negative.

"The wind does not lie in that quarter," resumed her ladyship. "She means that he is very deeply gone about one of the farmer's daughters."

"Dorina, the Red Rose of the Vale?"

"No, Moila, the Sweet Rose. And I think that one word is well applied, to mark the difference between them. Laura thinks Lynmore is in love with Moila."

"That is sheer nonsense. No son of mine could think of a girl in her position."

"Yet I imagine that all your sons think very much about them both. Mr. Desmond does, most decidedly, and Erroll—"

The invalid started nervously at the mention of her second son, and kept her eyes fixed on her friend's face as she continued,

"And Erroll is openly devoted to Dorina. But, by the way, Erroll is the handsomest

man I ever saw, differing much in style from his brothers, although they are fine young fellows also; but Erroll throws them in the shade by comparison. Even his twin-sister, Mrs. Laffere, is not so handsome."

"No, Emma is not so handsome, certainly," acquiesced Mrs. Desmond, dreamily.

"And so you think he admires Dorina?"

Then, waking up to keener interest, yet endeavouring to appear unconcerned, she repeated her question, "And so you think he admires Dorina?"

"Indeed, Lucy, I am quite sure he does. But I had better speak no more on this subject, for I see it is distressing to you, naturally so; indeed, for people in their position, it is preposterous."

"But tell me more; you need not fear to do so. What led you to suppose that Erroll fancied either of those girls? Either, it is all the same, so that it be either."

"I scarcely understand you. He took no pains to conceal his admiration; indeed, even Mildred Sarsfield, had she been present, might have taken umbrage at it. But there is something wrong with you to-day, you seem much more nervous than usual."

"Never mind. Do you think Mildred would have cared if she saw Erroll's attention to Dorina? Tell me the truth, for I am most anxious in this matter. You are Milly's friend, and know her so well. What would she say if he loved Dorina M'Dermott?"

"I cannot tell. She would be too proud to complain, even if she cared, which I do not think she does."

"You do not believe she cares about Erroll? Then you think she will not again encourage his addresses? Oh, it was torture that time, torture to my heart and soul!"

"Lucy, remember that Mildred is my relative, and great as my regard is for you, I cannot hear her slightly spoken of."

"I would not speak slightly of her; she is much too good for that."

"That she is, and I am sorry you do not like her. I never knew a more warm-hearted girl; and her affection for Sir Capel is a proof of that."

"True, and his for her. He was always the best of uncles, and Milly never felt the loss of her parents at Clonshavale. But you

will tell me more about her, for I know you are in her confidence. Surely, surely she never would dream of loving Erroll?"

"Never!"

Mrs. Desmond fixed upon her friend a burning gaze that revealed the strong excitement under which she laboured; and when that word "*never*" came slowly but decidedly from Lady Hamilton's lips, the invalid sank back on her cushions with a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER V.

A MYSTERY.

THE two girls who were present with Lady Hamilton at this interview stood in mute consternation looking on the pale features of the almost exhausted woman before them; then the elder lady motioned the girls to leave the room.

Her ladyship had never before seen her friend so agitated, yet she refrained from asking a single question. Through all the long years they had known each other, no shade of distrust had ever come between them; and although she witnessed the ravages of time and illness on the face she had loved in its youth, she never fancied until this moment that the canker-worm of either remorse or grief had anything to do with the disease which had wrought the untimely wreck she regretted to see.

"What can it be all about?" whispered Miss Beresby to Laura Hamilton, as they went arm in arm towards the conservatory "Something awfully mysterious. Surely Milly could not be an adventuress, or anything else very dreadful, that Mrs. Desmond has such an objection to her? Most mothers like their sons to marry a lady and an heiress; but here is one who evidently prefers a common farmer's daughter. It is a shame, and a disgrace to the age we live in."

"Poor lady," replied Laura; "she seems very miserable about it."

Miss Beresby fell into a short reverie before she spoke again.

"Which do you think is her favourite son?" she asked, abruptly.

"Mrs. Desmond's? It would be hard to say, for I can see no difference in her treatment of them."

"I am afraid she loves Walter best."

"Why afraid?"

"Because I believe he is destined to die young. I always had the same idea when I met him in London, and I cannot divest myself of it. However, this may be a fancy of mine; indeed, I hope so, and that he may

get stronger as he grows older. Did you ever see Mrs. Laffere, Erroll's twin-sister?"

"Yes, often; she has only been married about a year. What of her?"

"She did not seem to like Miss Sarsfield either."

"Another fancy of yours. This one, however, is quite wrong, as I trust the other is also. One thing I cannot dispute, and that is, that Mrs. Desmond evidently hates her, or fears her, or something like that, you know. Dear, dear, I do wonder what is at the bottom of it."

"We might wonder until doom's day, and not be a bit the wiser, so we had better give it up, for the present, at least; for here comes Mr. Desmond. No, no, it is only Lynmore," she added, mischievously. "The third son, my dear Laura, so shut your eyes, and turn your head another way."

"Even then I should hear his voice."

"There it is; there is the wisdom of us poor girls!—'Bow to reason as we will, gentle love will have us still.'"

"Folly, Miss Beresby."

"Sense, my pet; for even if you be blind to those glorious eyes, those noble features,

still the magic of that voice—oh! here he is.”

“Lynmore?”

“No, Mr. Desmond. The third son turned off in another path, and we should have the best of it, only for that stumbling-block, Milly Sarsfield; for if Erroll be in love with her, so is Walter, the heir.”

“Well, ladies, you were pleased with the wild flowers at Rosmary Farm?”

He came up before they answered.

“Yes, we were pleased with the M'Dermotts, if that be what you mean.”

“That is what I mean. Which do you prefer?”

“Dorina is the more brilliant, and, I think, the more clever of the two.”

“But, Moila,” said Laura, warmly, “Moila is so refined, so sweetly modest, and so unobtrusively good-natured—”

“Come, now, you are copying Lady Ada Grayston,” interrupted Miss Beresby, in mock horror. “Mr. Desmond, do you know that this young lady actually thinks Moila better looking than Miss Sarsfield?”

Walter did not blush like a girl as this arrow of curiosity was thrust so artfully at

him; but the motion of his lips, and the light in his eyes, revealed enough to that quick-witted lady to make her completely the mistress of his secret.

"You know," she added, laughingly, "that I have my designs on Sir Capel, dear old bachelor that he is, with his big heart and generous mind. I declare he is worth a dozen such young men as you are, Mr. Desmond."

"Thanks for the compliment, which, however, is simply the truth. But I shall not retaliate now, for there is the first dinner-bell, and you ladies make such an elaborate toilet, that a hungry fellow like me dreads giving the slightest excuse for your keeping him waiting a minute longer than is necessary. So run away, for charity sake."

"What will Mrs. Desmond do now?" whispered Miss Beresby to Laura, as they went to their dressing-rooms. "Surely she will think it as bad for the eldest son to marry Mildred as it would be for the second one. Walter has been a long time attached to her, if I can judge from observation, and marry her he will, no matter what objection

his mother has to her. I confess, I think it all very strange."

"So do I. I would give anything to know what that objection can be," replied Laura, thoughtfully. "I only hope poor Milly will not be the sufferer; however, it is all a mystery to me."

CHAPTER VI.

CLONSHAVALE.

THE soft moonlight falling on Clonshavale bathed it in peaceful beauty, and threw a charm over every tree and flower which grew upon that tranquil spot; while winding its way in the far distance the glittering waters of the Shannon could be seen through the green foliage, bearing on its breast many little pleasure-boats, which looked like white-winged sea-gulls skimming over its rippling tide.

Further still, the hills of Clare reared themselves in gentle beauty, illumined also by the silver light that glanced their tops, and cast their shadows on each vale and dell beneath.

Gazing on this scene of supreme loveliness, Sir Capel and Miss Sarsfield stood on a

parterre of flowers, a few paces from the house.

"It is very lovely," said the girl; "very dream-like and suggestive. Oh, that I were a poet or a painter, to immortalize it as thus I see it now! Dear old Clonshavale, there is no place like it on this earth for peaceful beauty and repose."

"Then you would not like to leave it, Milly?"

"Never, sir; never, indeed."

"Or me either," he whispered, more softly.

"Or you, Uncle. Never, never, never."

"Your voice is sad, your face is mournful, and your eyes,—my love; is this a tear?"

"Do not mind; it is caused by a feeling that will but too soon pass away. I never stand beside you thus, beneath the blue sky, and with your hand in mine, but my heart swells with gratitude towards Him, who has not only made earth so beautiful, but who has showered such benefits upon me. Oh! Uncle, could I be always thus, I would be always good."

"As you are, my darling. Who is better than my Milly? But, come, let us go in. You

shall sing me a song, and then be as merry as a lark again."

"Not yet; I have a secret to tell you."

"Enchanting."

"It is more than enchanting, sir."

"Any conspiracy against the Church or State?"

"Much more important."

"Angels and ministers—"

"If you do not be serious, I cannot tell you, Uncle. Come now, listen. Erroll Desmond—"

Sir Capel withdrew from the girl's side, and confronted her with a face so pale, that she was stopped in her speech as effectually as if her tongue had become suddenly paralyzed.

"Whatabouthim?" he asked; "what about Erroll? He has not asked you to marry him? I warned you against him. The man's attentions to you were always repugnant to me. I would rather see you shrouded in your coffin than know that you loved that man."

"Poor Erroll!"

"Poor, indeed! But, Milly, Milly, this must not be. You know not how inscrutable are the ways of Providence, and the punishment that falls on some devoted heads even

in this world. Should Erroll have gained a hold upon your heart, should you wish to become his wife—but, no, no, no; Heaven is too merciful for that.”

“Is he so bad, then, Uncle?”

“Yes, he is bad. He is a *roué* and a gamester. He is a wretch so vile, that the very thought of him contaminates a mind so pure as yours. He is a curse upon the earth,—a weapon to revenge the wrongs of an offended God. But, no, no; I must not let my passion run away with me: he is not what I say, Milly—he is a good young man enough; and, and—there, my child, I have frightened you.”

“Uncle, tell the truth; it will be safe with me. I always thought there was a mystery about Erroll. It is not because you pretend to think that he is either a *roué* or a gamester that you bid me not to love him. You know he is nothing of these. But there is something else, some secret connected with him which you know, and would not trust me with.”

“Hush! say no more. Your words might be overheard by some of the servants, who are always pinging about—at least, I think they are. Every one seems to be pinging about

in order to worry that secret from me; but I shall be true to my promise. Even against you, my best and dearest."

"You are right, sir; you must be so, for you are always right; and I shall not presume to speak more upon the subject."

"Good girl, good girl. Now let me hear what you were going to say before my passion stopped you."

"Erroll told me that—that his brother is to call on you to-morrow morning."

Sir Capel said, "Humph!" but did not seem to see the great importance which his niece attached to the fact of one gentleman calling on another.

"A duel, perhaps, my dear."

"Now, Uncle, you know those days are past. No, not a duel, something more friendly, —much more friendly."

"An arrangement for shooting partridge?"

"This is not the season."

"Fishing, hunting? No, all those kind of things are either out of season or out of fashion. What the deuce does the fellow want more than usual, and how came Erroll to tell you, puss?"

"He is his brother's confidant, and was

always my very best friend, therefore I can believe nothing so bad of him as you would have me believe, sir."

"I know, I know. I acknowledge he is not quite such a villain as I painted him, although he is a wild young scamp enough."

"At all events, he is a good gooseberry-picker."

"A high recommendation. Which brother is to pay me this momentous visit? Walter, I'll be bound."

"Yes, Uncle."

"Well, there is nothing new in that. Does he not pay a visit to Clonshavale every day of his life, and did so ever since he was a child? But I see it all clear enough now, my sly puss. So Erroll was the gooseberry-picker, the post-boy, and all that sort of thing, when we were afraid he was trying to catch you for himself. Well, we shall receive Walter when he comes to ask for your hand to-morrow. It is the richest gift I could bestow upon him."

"Then you would give it to him and not to Erroll? Now this is enough to make any sensible girl rebel. Give her quietly away to the man she loves—no, I mean the man she

does not love—without even letting her have a fight for him. I declare, Uncle, I shall marry Erroll just for spite.”

“That you could not.”

It was not Sir Capel who spoke now; the voice that uttered those words sounded with a soft and youthful music that struck an echoing music in Milly’s heart.

“You here, Walter?” she said, demurely.

“Yes. I am here Milly—my love, my life.”

“Sir, sir. Humph! I am here too. Hey, Walter? Look at me, her guardian, her uncle.”

“Whose presence is most welcome, if he can excuse a lover’s ardour.”

“And, imagining it morning, receive his proposals for a niece’s hand. Bless my soul, could you not have waited a few hours, and not be disturbing an old man like me at bed-time?”

“I was taking a walk in this direction, sir, and—and—in fact, I could not sleep another night without knowing my fate.”

“A big fate, truly, a tiny hand like that; and as if you did not know all about it long ago. Well, take it, fingers and all; and my blessing with it, Walter; for I know no

other man to whom I would so freely give it. She is my only one; not my child, in blood, at least, but far more so in love, and in the links which years and sympathy have woven round us. She is my only one; and I need not tell you to cherish her as I have done. I trust you, boy, for you were always a noble lad, and—and it is a great mercy that we shall never be far apart, for it is but a small distance from the Castle to Clonshavale.”

Mr. Desmond wrung Sir Capel's hand in eloquent silence, then turned to his promised bride with a smile of triumphant happiness, but she tossed up her pretty head, and pouted.

“What a tyrannical old guardian he is?” she said, glancing at her Uncle. “Actually giving away his ward's hand without consulting her at all in the matter. Mr. Desmond, I must humbly decline the honour you would confer upon me.”

With a curtsy of mock indignation, the girl passed her lover, and, flinging her arms round her Uncle's neck, kissed him warmly. She knew that in the little speech he had just made his heart was wrung with the

thought of parting from her, and she tried to carry it off by seeming carelessness. But it was a shallow subterfuge: each knew the other too well; and as the affectionate girl hung about the old man's neck, they thought no longer of concealing the feelings so natural to both.

Sir Capel was the first to recover composure; and, as Milly escaped into the garden, he joined Walter, who stood apart, in respectful consideration of the emotion he could not choose but witness.

"I foresaw that this would happen," he began, laying his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder. "It should come, sooner or later, of course; but I had rather it was some twelve months hence, not only because she is so young, and that I should like to keep her here, but—but—you know, of course, Walter, that Milly's father is not dead."

"Yes, sir, I know, although it is the general supposition that he is."

"Death is better than dishonour. But do you also know that my unfortunate brother long ago squandered away his daughter's fortune along with his own?"

"She told me so, sir."

"And yet you are willing to marry a penniless girl?"

"What difference does it make? I am rich enough for both."

The simple, manly answer drew a smile from Sir Capel, as he continued,—

"It is now many years since we heard from her father, who is almost a stranger to poor Milly. Then he was in California, leading the same wild life that he led here. You do not remember him, of course, Walter, for it is twenty years since he was here, and you were a little child then, indeed, almost a baby? Twenty years! what a length of time! Poor William!"

Sir Capel seemed to be forgetful of the young man's presence, and the lover was impatient to join his betrothed in the garden, for she had come before him twice in a most tantalizing manner, looking so sweet and happy in the moonlight, that he thought it cruel of her Uncle to detain him.

"You cannot leave me yet," said Sarsfield, guessing his thoughts. "You know that Milly's father left Ireland in disgrace, but you never knew in what that disgrace con-

sisted; and as you are now about to make his daughter your wife, I think it my duty to tell you."

"I would rather never hear it, sir. I know that you spared him from open shame; spare him now, for Milly's sake."

"That would not be fair to you, though Heaven knows that I would gladly do so."

"Then say no more; for if Milly's father were the vilest wretch that ever lived, it could make no difference in my feelings towards her."

"You would not wed the daughter of a murderer?"

"Great mercy, Capel Sarsfield, what do you mean?"

"Or a forgerer? or a—? But no, no. Bad though my brother was, he was not so bad as that."

"Yet even if he were, his daughter should be my wife. So now, sir, make your mind easy on the subject. Oh, there she is again!"

With these words, Walter bounded from Sir Capel's side, and had his arms round his betrothed a moment after.

The old man watched them from the

parterre of flowers,—he saw them walk slowly away enveloped in the silver light, that cast a halo, as it were, around them, it looked so peaceful and pure, teeming from its source above, and brightening earth with its simple grandeur.

Walter's head was bent over the blushing face he loved so well, his stately figure was drooped, his hand clasped hers, and, though Sir Capel could not hear the words that were breathed into that listening ear, he guessed their purport, and murmured, "The old love will be forgotten in the new, and I can never be again what once I was to her."

So they went out into the moonlight, Walter and his promised bride, with no shadow near them,—no fear, no doubt,—with nothing but that silver light to guide their footsteps, and to stream over the pictures of their future, which they drew together in that quiet garden.

CHAPTER VII.

TRIED.

THE approach of the harvest home is a bright and merry time for the young people in the country,—the brightest and merriest time in all the year. Few there were who had not some sweet reminiscences of its last anniversary—a word, a look, the tone of a voice that lingered with them all those twelve long months, and would linger with them to the grave.

To the aged the harvest-home must come with very different feelings; yet even to them it is a thing which brings back something of the joy of youth, what though they may be saddened by the longing for the “touch of a vanished hand, or subdued by the “still small voice” which speaks of the spirit land, yet they are gladdened by the anticipations of the harvest-home, and hail its approach with almost as keen a zest as

the gay young folk who chatter about it from morning until night.

Toby Downs excepted. Toby, the poor foundling, who owned no other name, who possessed no other tie than that which bound him to Rosmary Farm, he could not enter into the merry anticipations of a harvest-home. He had no sympathy with the young or with the old. Both had some resting-place for the heart, but Toby had none, and he felt sore about it. He belonged to no one, had never heard of his father or mother, and was looked upon as an "innocent,"—a polite way the Irish have for designating a fool. But though he was ugly and disagreeable, he was not a fool; far from it. As stated before, he possessed no tie except that which bound him to the farm, where he had lived from the time he was taken from the workhouse, a wretched little pauper; but at Rosmary he did nothing, except, indeed, he acted as a scarecrow when the grain was ripe. Yet that poor scarecrow had some one who cared for him, some one besides Him who cares for all His creatures, and that one was Moila M'Dermott.

She came beside him as he sat idly watching the light in the kitchen windows, thinking of the pies and puddings that were making within, and wishing that the ingredients might choke or poison one or two individuals who would be sure to come to partake of Mrs. M'Dermott's comfortable cheer; wishing either that that or some other accident should take place, little short of the annihilation of the world, to kill the two men he hated most on earth.

Moila came beside him when those wicked thoughts ran through his brain, and laid her hand upon his shoulder with a suddenness that made him start.

"Why, Toby, how I frightened you," she said, laughing at the tremor which shook him in every limb.

"You did, miss; I am so easily frightened now. You see I'm a' growin' old. Look at the colour o' my hair."

"Sprinkled with grey, I declare. Am I grey, too, Toby? I have as good a right to be so as you, for we are about the same age."

"You are not eighteen; while I, oh! I'm the age o' the man that lived so long in olden time."

“Methuselah?”

“Yes, him as you told me on, Methuselah. I’m as old as him.”

“Father took you from the workhouse when you were five years old, and here you have been ever since; that is exactly fifteen years ago, three days, and—what o’clock is it?”

“Five.”

“Yes, that is it; fifteen years, three ‘days, four hours, twelve minutes and a half. This makes you one year, three days, four hours and three-quarters older than Miss Dorina, yet she is not grey. Ah! Toby, you, poor fellow,—life passes slowly over you; while to her and me, oh! it goes over us like wildfire.”

“Because you are so happy, miss; and may all the saints in heaven keep you so. What is Miss Dorah doin’ now, I wonder?”

“Overseeing everything. She hunted me away as though I would have spoiled all the sweetmeats. What a useful girl she is, Toby!”

“Yes, that she be.”

“And so beautiful, so brilliant, so clever.”

“Yes, that she be,” repeated the foundling, rubbing his hands gleefully.

"And will make such a good wife for some rich gentleman one of these days."

"No, miss. No, no, no!" he said, excitedly; and his manner changed.

"Why not? What are you saying?"

"I dunno. Suppose it's the head that's crazed a bit, and it aches so bad. Ah! it aches so bad o' times, that I wish it wor laid at rest under the green sod in the old churchyard."

"Poor Toby, we should all miss you sadly."

"Would she?—would Miss Dorah? But there, there, the head is crazed again. What wor I goin' to say at all?"

"Never mind, here's a letter I want you to take to Clonshavale."

"To your godfather?"

"Yes, to Sir Capel. It is thanking him for presents he sent to Miss Dorina and me this morning. And here is another letter for Miss Mildred, who did not forget the humble girls at Rosmary Farm even amongst her grand friends at the Castle."

"And why should she? Arn't both o' you as good as she or they either? I'm certain you be, and better too."

Toby went away after this somewhat

sulky speech ; but had not gone far, when he saw that Moila was joined by Lynmore Desmond.

“They come like thieves, always a skulkin’ about the place,” muttered Toby ; “ comes with their bright looks and winnin’ ways to coax the hearts out o’ them girls. Why ain’t they satisfied wid the ladies at the Castle, and not be a sneakin’ after these ones ? If they harm a hair o’ their heads, I’ll not leave a whole bone in either of those men’s carcasses. My curse blight them gentlemen this night. Is the masther asleep, I wonther, that he never suspects why Erroll and Lynmore Desmond are comin’ here so often ? Well, let him sleep, poor man, for Toby Downs has the cunnin’ o’ a fox and the strength o’ a lion. So take care, Erroll Desmond, and you too, Lynmore Desmond, for Toby is like an Indian on your track, he warns you.”

While Toby chewed the cud of his bitter reflections outside, Dorina was assisting within doors to have everything properly prepared for the harvest-home ; for that much out of use fashion in Ireland was revived by her contrivance. There should,

of course, be dancing on the lawn, and as much of course should there be dancing in the barn. No mean place either for that pleasant pastime, for flags of various colours waved from the ceiling, and the walls were dotted thickly with sconces, not of silver certainly, but the brightest of tin; over these were festooned wreaths of ivy, sprinkled here and there by a red poppy or a blue convolvulus, so arranged that the stems being kept in water, they would remain fresh even after the great occasion for which they were designed. This was also a contrivance of Dorina's, to expedite which every one was running here and there and everywhere for all the maimed glasses and fractured cups or mugs in the concern. It was a clever contrivance, too, for the vessels were artistically covered with sprays of wheat-ears and holly berries, which gave a picturesque effect to the decorations, it being Dorina's object to do as much as possible with nature before she had recourse to art. Even Mr. M'Dermott, who loved plenty of light and colour, declared it pretty, although vowing that the yellow and red paper flowers which the teachers made for the Sunday School feasts,

would have looked better than the sprays of jasmine and heavy smelling flowers of Dorina's fancy.

When the barn was "laid out" to her entire satisfaction, Dorina had to superintend the culinary department,—indeed, she had so many things to attend to, and her time was so fully occupied, that she never missed her sister, and was not aware of her absence until that young lady appeared before her with such a pallid countenance, that she stood with a basket of fruit poised in her hand to look at her.

"Moila, are you ill, dear?" she asked, letting the contents of the basket roll about the floor.

"No, Dorina ; I am not ill, but very, very tired,"—and the girl sat down with a weary sigh.

There was no one in the apartment but themselves ; however, for better security, Dorina fastened the door, and came to her sister's side.

"Something has occurred, Moila—something about Lynmore Desmond."

She stood partly behind the chair the other had taken, so that Moila could not see the

burning light of the eyes that looked down upon her.

"Why do you not speak? Something about Mr. Lynmore has agitated you? Has he been here this evening?"

"Yes. I am after parting from him now."

"Not in anger?"

"No, not in anger."

"Then you will see him again to-morrow?"

"I hope not; indeed, indeed I hope not."

"And why? Moila, did he ask you to marry him?"

"Marry him! he so great a gentleman, and I—but a poor and humble girl?"

Dorina left her place at the back of the chair, and came forward, literally quivering with indignation.

"What do you mean?" she asked. Has he dared—?"

"No, no, not that; he has dared nothing bad. Oh! Dorah, dear, it is hard enough for Charles Rochfort to think evil of him without your doing so. He is too good, too honourable, to insult one more humble even than Moila M'Dermott."

"Then you have had some misunderstanding?"

"No; but I hope he will not come here until what he said this night is forgotten."

"And what was that? Cannot you tell me plainly, child? Did he ask you to be his wife?"

"What put such an idea into your head? Dismiss it at once, for he has never asked me anything of the kind,—why should he? But—but Charles Rochfort and he have had hot words."

"Charles is a jealous fool, and I suppose knows quite well that you care nothing for him. How dare he quarrel with one so much his superior as Mr. Desmond?"

Moila raised her head in a questioning manner; but only drew her sister nearer to her.

Dorina, kneeling before her, wound her arms round the supple waist, and looked up lovingly into her face. It was a pretty picture of trusting affection, and the stately Dorina never looked more beautiful than in that humble attitude.

"Do you think anything would tempt me to marry a gentleman in Mr. Lynmore's position, even if I loved him?" asked Moila. "No, I would not. I have too much pride

to enter a family where I could not be welcome."

There was no answer for a few moments, during which those blue eyes were never taken from the face upraised to hers; and, despite Dorina's efforts to bear that scrutiny without flinching, she could not conceal the anger that filled her heart at Moila's words. But Moila seemed not to notice it, for she rose, picked up the fruit, replaced it in the basket, and went away.

The harvest-home was forgotten in the deeper feelings which now engrossed Dorina. So many hopes and fears assailed her, that feeling she could not breathe freely except in the open air, she went out and looked wistfully over the fields, which were bare and lonely, now that the haggard was stored with their spoil.

She remained near the house; yet from where she sat Clonshavale could be distinctly seen. She thought of her godfather, Sir Capel, to whom she and Moila had always gone in their childish troubles, feeling confident of being soothed by gentle coaxings and lollipops, to whom they went in their more formidable difficulties, and from whom

they never parted without feeling in charity with all the world.

Sir Capel Sarsfield's forefathers had been the M'Dermotts' landlords, for which reason he thought himself bound to feel an interest in all the M'Dermott belongings. Thus he became godfather to their daughters, who, when they grew old enough for him to understand, he loved for themselves alone—loved almost as well as he loved his niece Mildred. However, since the time of his forefathers, Rosmary Farm had changed hands, and was now the property of the Desmonds.

There had been some talk of a flaw in the lease of the farm, but Mr. M'Dermott, having the strictest confidence in his landlord, did not trouble his head about it, always believing that the word of a Desmond was as good as a lease any day.

Gazing on the old mansion, Dorina felt a yearning for the sympathy which had always brightened her existence; and remembering that Miss Sarsfield had promised her some hothouse plants for her harvest-home decorations, she made that an excuse for a walk to Clonshavale.

Her mind was so full of plans for the morrow, that she took no thought of the evening shadows which were gathering thick and fast around her; so, enjoying the stillness of the scene, she tripped along, singing softly as she went.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE RUINS.

THE hour was soft and tranquil; the air was laden with fresh perfumes, and the evening star seemed to look down on her with encouragement, as Dorina went lightly along, humming her careless song, until another voice interrupted her.

She had not observed a gentleman strolling about in an adjoining field, evidently for the purpose of enjoying a cigar, so oblivious did he seem to everything else, and it was her footsteps that made him look round.

"Dorina," he ejaculated, and was over the little hedge that separated them in a second.

"Oh, Mr. Desmond, how you startled me!" she said, pausing.

"Thought I was a ghost, perhaps?"

She laughed lightly, and resumed her walk in a flurried manner.

"Let me accompany you, wherever you are going?" he asked.

"I am going to Clonshavale."

"Then so shall I."

"No, Mr. Desmond. I would rather go alone."

"That is not fair. But call me Erroll; that name sounds so much sweeter from your lips. You need not frown, for you know I mean what I say."

She did not answer, but quickened her pace; while he, flinging away his cigar, walked beside her until they reached one of the ancient ruins with which Ireland abounds, and through which was the shortest way to Sir Capel Sarsfield's demesne. Yet it appeared so much in shadow at that moment, that Dorina hesitated before she could bring herself to enter.

"Are you afraid?" he asked, seeing her pause.

"Afraid? No; why should I be?"

"Right. Some of our fine ladies at the Castle would not go through that old Abbey at this hour for double the worth of their grandmothers' diamonds."

"They do not know the place as well as I

do; neither, perhaps, would they set much value on the reward of their temerity."

She entered the ruins as she spoke, he following on her footsteps, saying,—

"Not set value on jewels? How much you know about them. I can assure you those ladies would look very small without the lustre of those costly gems. Their beauty is not like yours, Dorina, natural in its perfection."

"I hate flattery, Mr. Desmond."

"Call me Erroll." He caught her hand, and repeated passionately, "Call me Erroll, for I love you, Dorina. You know I love you."

"You told me so often enough; but you should not speak like this, sir. What would your mother say if she learned that one of her proud sons had uttered such words to me?"

"She shall never learn it."

"Indeed!"

"Dorina, listen to me. I love you: I can make you rich; I shall be true to you, and every effort of my life shall be to see you happy."

"Sir, should I be welcome as a daughter

to your mother, who is so proud, and yet who is so kind and good?"

"What matters any one's welcome? However, she shall know nothing about it."

"That I can't understand, for a man seldom woos a girl unless to ask her hand in marriage, and a son's wife can scarcely remain in secret always."

"Wife?"

"Yes, wife, I said. When an honourable man woos a girl, he means to marry her; it is the villain who woos her to perdition. Which are you, sir, the villain or the man?"

"How can you talk such nonsense; be reasonable. All my fortune shall be at your disposal; and I am tolerably rich, thanks to my mother. When I become heir to Castlethomond I shall be my own master. Who can tell the changes of a life? And if anything happens to Walter—"

Dorina pressed her hands over her ears, that they might not be contaminated with more of the evil things it had been her fate so far to listen to, and, with one glance, took in her position. She was alone in the ruins with one who had often before reiterated his vows of love, but who had never spoken so

freely as now; and who, to judge from his looks at that moment, was capable of any wickedness. To defy him, would be madness; to try to escape, would be equally unwise; so she allowed him to retain her hand until she could make up her mind how to act, or what next to say.

"You will be at the harvest-home to-morrow, Mr. Desmond?" she asked, at length.

"Brightest, call me Erroll."

"Well, Erroll."

"A thousand thanks. Yes, I shall be there, if you will promise to be mine."

"I shall tell you then. But now you must conduct me home, as I have delayed here too long to go to Clonshavale."

"You have not delayed five minutes."

"What is the hour?"

"Scarcely half-past eight."

"So late? You will prove your generosity now by not speaking another word on this subject until to-morrow. I did not think of the hour when I left the farm; but if we walk quickly, father may not miss me."

So speaking, she hurried him out of the ruins and towards the house.

Once near home, Dorina's courage returned, and her natural spirit, conquering the fear that had prompted her to hide her anger, burst out in greater fury for having been curbed so long.

"Let us part here," she said. "But before we do, let me tell you, Erroll Desmond, that I have just now listened to the vilest insult which could come from human lips when addressed to a virtuous woman. You spoke of the splendour with which you and such as you would gild the position of a fallen creature; but what could make her content, unless she were as degraded as yourselves? And woe betide the wretch who casts the stain upon her! You have mistaken me, not because I am better than other girls, not because I do not care for splendour, or that I do not love you, but because I loathe dishonour and despise the treachery that would blast more than my life, my honest name."

"Dorina, I swear—"

"Peace: hear me out, Erroll Desmond. I would rather die here at your feet than be the thing that you would make me. Now go your way, and never cross my path again."

"Listen one second: if the offer came from Lynmore would it be refused?"

She was shocked and frightened at this, but not daunted.

"I could never fancy such to be the case, because *he* is a gentleman," she retorted, haughtily.

"Then I am not one. But if he sought you as now I seek you, loving you as truly, as passionately—"

"I would scorn him with much more scorn than now I feel for you, because I should feel it more acutely. It is only when we are deceived in those we trusted that our bitterest indignation is aroused."

"Then you never trusted me? This is too much. Do you know what you are saying?"

"I say what I think, for there is nothing on God's earth so despicable to me as you are at this moment."

"This is defiance."

"I fear you not; why should I?"

"Because I am powerful. But I will not threaten, Dorina. Forgive me. I am sorry for what has occurred. Consent to be my wife, and I will marry you in the face of all the world."

A look of triumph flashed from her eyes, and for the time everything was forgotten ; even the sense of her just anger left her, as if by magic. He offered to marry her ! Dorina M'Dermott to become a Desmond ! If a king had condescended to share his throne with her, she could scarcely have been more surprised or her senses more intoxicated by ambition than now. But Erroll saw that he had gone too far, and his next speech dashed her highflown fancies to the ground.

He drew her unresistingly towards him, and murmured,—“I knew you did not hate me ; nay, you love me : I see you do. If you leave this place and trust me, we shall be happier than if a troublesome fetter bound us.”

She heard no more, but fled away like a wounded fawn, and entered her father's house, panting with the sense of wrong that he had done her. But her ambition had been fired, and never again could be entirely subdued. She thought that if she were cautious and wary, she would yet win his name. And she would try ; yes, she would try.

It was a cold way for reasoning for one so young and warm-hearted as Dorina,—for

one who preferred another as she acknowledged to herself that she preferred Lynmore. But there are many contradictions in human nature, and the woman who has never been tempted by ambition knows nothing of the trials which assail those who have. However, the farmer's daughter had not yet taught herself to be a worldling, for, terrified at her own thoughts, she sought the privacy of her chamber, and endeavoured not only to close her senses to the tempter, but to remember her humble parentage, and her duty towards the lady who had always been kind to her; for Mrs. Desmond, even in the midst of pain and sickness, would gladly receive Dorina, and often invited her to the Castle among those of her aristocratic guests, who were most intimate there. She little guessed the harm she was doing in throwing her in the way of her sons, and in cultivating the girl's taste for the beautiful and refined.

Trying to shut out the tempter, Dorina sat by the window; but that was the wrong position for her efforts, for there she saw Erroll walking moodily to and fro, right in the beams of the rising moon,—saw him light a cigar

and fling it away unsmoked, then another and another, all of which shared the same fate, until he turned on his heel and retraced his steps. Then she fancied that she felt more wicked than she ever felt before. She had no pity for him, she hated him; and at that moment would have been almost glad to see him writhe on red-hot irons, to punish him for what he had said to her. But he walked away in the moonlight, unscathed, except by his own conscience, if, indeed, it troubled him at all. And she watched his shadow on the grass, tracing the outline of his figure with something like a curse on his almost god-like beauty.

Here was a secret she could not bring to Clonshavale—could not tell her pure young sister or her parents; so she determined to shroud it in the innermost recesses of her own heart, unavenged, except by whatever lay in her power to avenge it.

Then the difference in the three brothers forced itself upon her mind: two were all that was good and honourable, but Erroll had asked her to become—what?—not his wife, certainly; and that other name would have choked her, had she dared to utter it.

Walter and Lynmore were all that was high and noble, but this one would have dragged her honour to the dust. No wonder Dorina believed that she worshipped Lynmore with a love as deep as it was unsuspected by any one except Moila and herself, for this insult from the man who was destined really to awaken her strongest passions now rankled in her brain and made her hate him: it had been given deliberately, and almost in the midst of the preparations for the harvest-home—that most memorable time in all the year.

What a harvest-home it was likely now to be to her! If Erroll were to be present, his very look would chafe her temper and spoil her pleasure. Then, if whatever dispute or quarrel which had occurred between Moila, Charles Rochfort, and Lynmore should keep the latter away, of what use would be the schemes which she had formed for the beautifying of Rosmary? What, though all the grand people from the Castle would come, what though the crowned heads of Europe should come to do honour to the farm? if *he* stayed away, all the world would be a blank to her!

It is wonderful how a maiden's fancy can colour all her hopes, for, labouring under its delusions, the ideal becomes reality.

Very bitter were the girl's thoughts as she sat by the window watching the moon sink behind the clouds, to burst out afresh in brighter glory as they passed away. She wondered if the clouds which darkened her life would pass away like them, or if the light of happiness would ever illumine her future lot as those silvery beams illumined all they fell upon.

Perhaps there was something in the moonlight that calmed her at last, for she traced its beams upon the grass and on the flowers, pondering on its beauty, although wondering why it looked so pure, once having touched the earth. Then she looked on the blue sky, and again on the light clouds that drifted onward into space, somehow comparing them to human beings fading off into eternity. Then she felt what a mite she was, and how little she would be missed from the great world if she passed away like those fleeting clouds. So, with her face turned heavenwards, the tears burst forth unconsciously until their influence brought back her better

feelings, and she was once more the good and affectionate Dorina M'Dermott who was the pride and delight of Rosmary Farm.

Late as the hour was before she thought of going to rest, she could not forego her usual good night's kiss to Moila; so, lighted by the harvest-moon, she stole into the adjoining room, and, bending over the quiet figure in the bed, pressed her lips to the brow which was half-shrouded by bright masses of auburn hair, and went away.

She did not see the white face that turned itself upon the pillow as she left the chamber, nor the clasped hands that were raised imploringly towards her, before Moila again settled herself in the semblance of repose.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HARVEST-HOME—MORNING.

THE auspicious day arrived, and the sisters stood before their parents in laughing depreciation of the praise they were bestowing on their charms.

“’Deed but she looks a lady, every inch of her, does my Dorah,” protested the farmer.

“And why not?” asked the wife. “Didn’t you spend a fortune on her education? and I’m sure the blood of the M’Dermotts has never been the worse for mixing with the blood of the O’Gradys. Why should not both of them look like ladies? Let me see who from the Castle will look as much so.”

And the girls quite deserved the encomiums which made them blush to listen to, dressed as they were in simple white, with every

ribbon and ornament alike, and looking so unconscious of their beauty, that the old farmer thought it his bounden duty to impress his sentiments upon them. This he was doing to all intents and purposes, by giving each a hearty kiss, when Toby entered, and, casting a quick glance at the little group, passed on without speaking.

“What an ill-omened thing he looks: more discontented than ever to-day,” said M'Dermott, gazing after the foundling with as much anger in his honest face as it was possible for it to assume.

“Poor fellow,” returned Moila, “he has not much to make him otherwise.”

“Not much, child? Hasn't he the best of food and plenty of good raiment? What more can a fellow like him want? Just look at the figure he cuts, his hair uncombed, and his jacket hanging off one arm, like a huzzar's.”

“I shall make him smarten himself,” said Moila. And away she tripped, not to go on her errand in vain; for a short time afterwards Toby was seen with his hair brushed, and his face polished to a very painful state of perfection. A flaming neck-handkerchief, which was his special glory, was tied round

his neck with a large bow in front, and altogether he looked so spruce that even Dorina congratulated him on his appearance—a piece of condescension which was a rich compensation for the terrible labour he had gone through in accomplishing such an extraordinary feat of the toilet.

There were some slight preparations also going on at the Castle for the harvest-home—at least, preparations in the dress department. Every one should put on holiday clothes; not, of course, that those grand people had any holiday clothes, but all thought themselves bound to look their best. And so they did, all except one, and that one was not the invalid Mrs. Desmond, who had rallied wonderfully for this especial occasion.

At about eleven o'clock Erroll was passing Walter's room, and, on hearing a slight moan, entered without ceremony. The heir was lying on a sofa, looking so pale, that Erroll ran to him in alarm. It was not the first time he had surprised his brother thus: once or twice before he had remonstrated with him for concealing, or rather ignoring, the fact that anything was organically wrong with

him; but Walter laughed it off, and now again endeavoured to do so. However, for once Erroll was determined.

He rang for his valet, and was about to despatch him for the family physician, when Walter raised himself and stopped him.

“For Heaven’s sake do not be so foolish, Erroll,” he said. “Why, if mother saw the doctor here, she would imagine I was dying, and I would not frighten her for the world, poor dear. She is better to-day, and for mercy’s sake let her remain so. There, now you see I am all right again. Why, man, I am accustomed to those fits—they are nothing.”

But Walter’s looks contradicted his words, and Erroll carried his point. However, by the valet’s contrivance the doctor’s visit was paid in secret, and an hour afterwards the two young men left the Castle together.

It was a pretty sight that greeted them at Rosmary Farm: the coloured tents, dotting the fresh green fields, the snowy tables stretching here and there and everywhere over the lawn, with plenty of substantial fare upon them. The neighbours from far and near in their best attire, the ladies and gentlemen from the Castle, and many other of the sur-

rounding gentry—every one was bidden to the feast: high and low, rich and poor, the lord and the peasant, the titled ladies and the humble cottage girls, all met freely together, on the same social standing, for this day, at least; and never were a more genial host and hostess than Farmer M'Dermott and his blooming wife.

To Dorina the feasting and speechifying were almost intolerable, but Moila seemed to take an interest in everything that was said and done. However, for a reason best known to herself, she avoided Lynmore Desmond, who, to her mortification, was about the first guest on the lawn. To his brother Erroll she was all affability, little imagining, poor girl, how he had insulted her sister but a few hours before.

As the day wore on, a trifling incident occurred which marred Moila's pleasure for the time. Two friends from the village with whom she was most intimate, Kathleen and Charles Rochfort, had been tardy in making their appearance, and were affectionately chided for it. The girl excused herself on the plea of her mother's indisposition, which was simply the truth, but the young man retorted

with a bluntness which hurt the gentle chider.

"Our absence could not make any difference when Mr. Desmond is present," he said. "He is near you, and that is sufficient. Better for all parties if he were a thousand miles away."

"There has been enough on that subject already between you and me, Charlie," said Moila, indignantly. "Let it not be repeated if you value my friendship."

"It is because I value your friendship that I would put you on your guard against him. What business has a gentleman like Desmond to be always dangling after you?"

"That is my affair, not yours. If you have so little trust in your friends, you are not worthy of them. You forgot yourself last evening with Mr. Lynmore, and I intend to tell Kathleen all about it."

"As you wish," retorted Charles, abruptly leaving them.

He had not got far, however, when he relented and went back; but at that moment the girls were accosted by one of the gentlemen who had formed the party from the Castle, he being no less a person than a handsome young baronet.

“Another,” muttered Charles, going off in a different direction; “another. It was not bad enough for Mr. Lynmore to be turning her head with his flatteries, but this fellow must now appear. Well, no wonder she should be paid so much attention: she is such a lovely girl, and I—I am such a fool for loving her so madly; yet I sometimes think she cares for me, and but for my high-born rival I might have a chance of winning her. I forgot myself last night with Mr. Lynmore; that was what she said. But, how did I forget myself? The two were walking together very lover-like,—he so busy talking, and she so busy listening,—that they never saw me until I said something not over-polite, perhaps, to the young gentleman. He well deserved a horse-whipping, I do believe. Ah! Moila, Moila! She little dreams on what a swampy ground she is treading: it is covered over with such bright flowers, that she cannot see her danger. Oh! that she had a brother to protect her, for her trusting old father is little more than a simpleton in matters like this; and if I interfere again—well, come what may, I must not do that—for her pride and anger cut me to the soul.”

While Mr. Rochfort was thus communing with himself, he watched the object of his adoration with no small displeasure, cursing in his heart the jealous rage that made his life a burden to him. Yet, all unconscious of his feelings, Moila and Kathleen laughed and chatted to the gentlemen who had joined them as though there had never been a Charles Rochfort in the world.

Erroll had not yet ventured to address Dorina, who, at every available moment, hovered near his mother with some little attention, which is always gratifying to an invalid. Great as was the difference in the position of these two women, Mrs. Desmond had always shown a fondness for Dorina that she had never shown to any of her aristocratic guests, each of whom seemed tacitly to understand that they were to give place to the farmer's daughter for this day at least. Thus Dorina ingratiated herself into the good graces of the proud lady more than ever. However, it was with no selfish motive that she devoted so much of her time to Mrs. Desmond,—she was prompted by sympathy for her sufferings and admiration for her gentle nature—a nature so humble and

loving, that it seemed to make excuses for the faults and foibles of all around her. Then many other charms attracted the humble girl to the lady with a deep and reverential affection that had lasted for years, and was likely to last much longer.

"So, Dorina, you have heard of Walter's engagement?" said Mrs. Desmond, beckoning her to a seat beside her.

"Yes, madam, and was delighted at the news; it adds another charm to our harvest-home. The prospect of a marriage between the Lord of the Manor and Sir Capel's niece is delightful news to every one. I love Miss Sarsfield dearly: she is so good, so beautiful, and will be such a tender daughter to you."

Dorina stopped abruptly, for a white shade was growing about Mrs. Desmond's lips, and a shrinking, timid look was coming into her eyes, that the girl did not like to see, but, as if determined to battle out her dislike to Milly, and to speak freely of her son's marriage, Mrs. Desmond renewed the subject instantly.

"Yes, Miss Sarsfield is everything that one could desire."

"Then, it is such a good thing, as well as being such a happy marriage for her. I sup-

pose she can never again expect to see her father?"

Again Dorina stopped, for Mrs. Desmond had clasped her hands as though in pain. The white shade grew broader, and the timid look grew more shrinking, until once more the invalid renewed what seemed to Dorina a species of self-torture.

"Her father is no protection to her, poor girl—never was. She lost her fortune through his extravagance, as you know; however, that signifies nothing to my son. Sir Capel says she shall be his heir; but Walter will not listen to anything of the kind. He has settled only a thousand a year on her for pin-money, because she would not accept more. The dear boy seems infatuated about her. Oh! there is Miss Beresby. What do you think of her? But, as fashion has pronounced her perfect, of course you cannot find fault."

"She is not much when compared to Miss Sarsfield; but, of course, comparisons are odious. However, I think she lacks sensibility and refinement."

"The most severe criticism you could pass on any female. She was brought up in a school very different to Mildred, whose mind

was cultivated with the most tender care, and never distorted by the influence of worldly parents."

"I think Mrs. Sarsfield died when Miss Mildred was very young."

"Yes, she was scarcely six years old when she came to Clonshavale after her mother's death."

"Who could believe that any one belonging to Sir Capel could be so bad as poor Miss Milly's father was? Is he anything like Sir Capel in appearance?"

Again Dorina felt she had got on dangerous ground, for she saw Mrs. Desmond tremble and shift about nervously on her chair, so turned the conversation as quickly as possible.

Sitting there, beside that quiet delicate woman, Dorina wondered if it was sorrow more than illness which had made her old before her time. As far as she could judge, she had everything to contribute to her happiness, yet even before her husband's death Mrs. Desmond looked quite as sad and pale as now.

Studying that sweet face, Dorina was unconscious of any other presence, until a voice she well knew, said, "What a com-

plete success you have made of your harvest-home, Miss M'Dermott; ours will be a comparative failure, I fear."

She made some reply; but what it was, in the confusion of the moment, she could not tell. She was thrown off her guard by the abruptness of Lynmore's speech, and he could not but notice the blush that dyed her face as it was raised to his.

"Mother," he next said, "the carriage is waiting; I shall see you home, and shall call for you again after a few hours. You will be refreshed for the evening when you have taken your siesta."

This plan was acted upon, and a short time afterwards Lynmore was again by Dorina's side.

"They are preparing to dance," he said; "Lady Hamilton and your father are to lead off, with Lord Greyston and your mother as *a vis à vis*. Shall we get others, and form a set for ourselves, or will you be content with a side?"

"I shall be content," returned Dorina, smiling, as she moved away leaning on Lynmore's arm.

They met Mildred, her uncle, and Walter,

all laughing and chatting together, the gayest trio among that gay assemblage. Never did Dorina witness such perfect trust and harmony; never did she see Milly look so queen-like in her beauty as now, with her young face blushing beneath her lover's eloquent glances.

With an irresistible impulse, Dorina caught Miss Sarsfield's extended hand in both her own, and pressed it ardently. It was a silent congratulation on her engagement, and was well understood by her to whom it was given.

"Our Red Rose has gathered fresh bloom since I saw her last," said Sir Capel, touching Dorina's cheek with an admiring gesture.

"Perhaps the improvement can be attributed to this," she replied, holding up her arm, and displaying a beautiful bracelet, his own gift to her.

"It needs no jewels to adorn that rounded limb, my dear. But where is my other god-daughter, the Sweet Rose, Moila?"

"You are losing your memory, uncle dear," said Milly, laughing; "we met her a dozen times to-day, and always with the same chevalier, Sir William Heatherington."

"To be sure, to be sure; and very pretty she looked too. No wonder the young baronet should single her out as his partner for the day. No wonder, indeed."

Lynmore's brow grew dark and his lips became compressed as Sir Capel spoke; but no one noticed him, for at that moment Walter suddenly leaned on the old man's shoulder, and every one's attention was centred on him: he had become white as death—a cold moisture had broken over his face; but with a quick effort he conquered what seemed to be the approach of a fainting fit, and the next moment he held the terrified Milly's hand in his, with a whispered assurance that it was nothing.

Slight as the incident was, it checked the mirth of the little group, and all Walter's efforts were futile to renew it.

"I never knew you to be attacked like this before," persisted Lynmore, uneasily.

"I assure you it is nothing. I never felt better than I do at this moment. Sir Capel, there is Lady Hamilton beckoning to you; Milly and I are going to join the dancers."

"But, my dear boy, you really must not

do so. Stay, I entreat. Oh, youth! what a headstrong thing you are, to be sure!"

The old man spoke only to himself now, for the young people were lightly tripping over the greensward.

In the same dance were Dorina and her partner, and when it was ended he lingered by her side: they entered into many games and other pleasures of that delightful day, the time flying by on fleetest pinions. Then he led her through groves and shaded walks, by the river and over the rustic bridge, speaking in low and tender tones, although the words they formed were commonplace enough; but she only listened to the music that thrilled her heart — only felt that wherever Lynmore led was fair as the plains of Paradise to her; and, giving herself up to such delusive happiness, Dorina took no note of the fleeting hours until the twilight gathered round them.

CHAPTER X.

THE HARVEST-HOME—EVENING.

THE soft blue sky deepening in its twilight beauty spread a wondrous charm over the scene which Dorina and her companion paused to look at. The gay tents and the gayer people in the distance enhanced the quiet of their own position, and made the stillness fall upon her heart in a sort of prayerful happiness. To be permitted this one day of loving intercourse with the only being who had then the power of stirring the innermost depths of her soul filled her with such ecstasy, that the girl, uncovering her head, raised her face upwards with a smile which held Lynmore almost breathless beside her, until she turned to him and said,—

“Do you not feel the beauty of this spot?”

“Feel it, no; the only beauty I felt that moment was the beauty of your face. Look

up like that again, wear that same smile once more, and I shall be tempted to kneel at your feet in admiration as of an angel. What were you thinking of? Your whole soul beamed in your eyes; and never did an expression of rapt sublimity come more purely on the features of an adoring saint."

She made no reply, but, replacing her hat, turned away the face whose beauty he extolled with such a look of utter misery, that had he seen it, perhaps something of the truth might have dawned upon him.

"Shall we extend our walk?" he asked.

"It is growing late," she replied; "and by taking this path we can pass through the fern grotto: it is the shortest."

"I never saw the fern grotto by twilight, but I could fancy it a more perfect fairy palace than ever, with its leafy drapery, its rocky ledges, and its other beauties all in shade, then those wondrous little rivulets, which keep murmuring their mystic stories to the white granite everywhere yet nowhere, for you can never find them out, they are always covered with mossy sheen and trailing creepers. It is the very prettiest spot about Rosmary, and far exceeds any-

thing we have at Castlethomond. But who is this walking towards us in such a spectral guise? A stranger, I believe."

The person to whom Lynmore alluded passed them with a slight inclination of the head and a smile of courtesy; but Desmond returned neither, for, starting suddenly round, he stared after that tall figure, enveloped in a black cloak, until it disappeared; then he looked at Dorina with a comically puzzled expression on his handsome face.

"Do you know him?" he asked.

"No. I never saw him before, to my knowledge."

"I fancy I have seen him, though where or when I do not remember. I wonder why he pulled his hat over his brows as we came up, and why he wears that cloak such a sultry evening as this?"

"He may be recovering from an illness, and, as all are welcome to Rosmary's harvest-home, perhaps he took this opportunity of getting some amusement and fresh air at the same time."

"He does not seem to care for amusement, at all events. Poor man, how grave he looked—grave, and yet so handsome. Where

could I have seen him before? It is very provoking I cannot bring it to mind."

"It will come when you are not thinking about it; and, after all, perhaps you only see in him a likeness to some one else you know."

Lynmore was still in perplexity about the unknown, when they came to the fern grotto and looked in. It was, indeed, very beautiful, and others admired it also, for, seated on a rustic bench were the betrothed pair, Milly and Walter, evidently enjoying it, or rather enjoying each other, for, with her head resting on his shoulder, and his arms encircling her, they were unconscious of any presence except their own. The festive scene upon the lawn was forgotten, and everything else beside, so much they made each other's world; and seated thus, embowered by fern and trailing tendrils from shrubs which grew upon the rocky shelves above them, an artist might have made them a study of love and trustfulness.

Dorina paused, for something about the lovers filled the grotto with a solemnity that she thought it would be almost a sacrilege to disturb; yet she could not tear herself

away, could not withdraw her gaze from those young figures, until Lynmore held his hand before her eyes, and whispered,—

“You must not see more of Paradise as yet.”

She did not answer, but, bowing gravely, withdrew.

That picture was destined to haunt her for many years. It was often recalled in her dreams, and when it came unbidden in her waking hours, it wrung tears of sorrow from her regretful heart.

Neither from Lynmore’s mind was it to be ever wholly obliterated. In the busy scenes of life it obtruded itself, and made him miserable, alone or in crowds alike.

A few paces from the grotto they saw Moila, who was talking pleasantly to the young baronet, of whom Sir Capel had spoken as having devoted himself exclusively to her. They were going towards the house, in the same direction with Dorina and her companion; yet Moila only glanced at her sister, and smiled as she passed on.

Dorina’s arm was not leaning on Lynmore’s now, but she thought that if it were so, she would have felt his tremble; for she

saw his eyes following Moila's graceful figure, and she fancied that at that moment he would have given much to have changed places with Sir William Heatherington. She believed he loved her sister, but the preference that had lived in her own heart for years, and which had been fed only by a few careless words or looks, she imagined could not be influenced by that.

When they arrived at the part of the lawn which was most gaily dotted with tents, they found the revellers dispersing in little groups, some admiring the lamps of various hues, which were being lighted in the boughs of the great elm trees, others to seek sequestered spots where vows of eternal constancy could be more freely spoken; but for the most part, the jovial people were hurrying towards the barn, there to renew the dancing, which was sure to be kept up vigorously until morning. Thither also Dorina and Lynmore repaired, but before they reached it, the girl stopped short, and, pointing before her, said,—

“There is the stranger again; he is looking towards us.”

“Yes, and coming too,” replied Lynmore.

“Now I shall know him, do what he will with his hat and cloak, which I suppose he has adopted as a disguise.”

But the gentleman as he advanced removed the hat and threw back the cloak, as if in contradiction of these words.

“Excuse me,” he said, in a voice so soft that even Dorina wondered at its music; “excuse me, sir, but if I mistake not you are Mr. Erroll Desmond?”

“No, sir, only his younger brother. Erroll is on the lawn, I think, although I have not seen him for some hours.”

“There must be some great resemblance between you, since I took one for the other,” replied the stranger, as he bowed and moved away.

“Resemblance between Erroll and me?” muttered Lynmore, watching the figure in the cloak as it glided amongst the revellers, apparently on the search for some one.

“I for one never thought so,” said Dorina, “for you are in bolder type what your mother must have been in perfect female beauty; and Mr. Erroll is not like her.”

“Those who wish to flatter me, say I am like my mother, who, by the way, I see has

come back already. But I wonder now more than ever who that stranger can be, for even with his head uncovered I cannot remember; indeed, the very action of removing his hat obliterated the half-formed ideas I had about him. If he were a robber, reconnoitering before he matured a plan for stealing any of your father's property, he would not have removed what I thought was a disguise; and if he came for any other evil purpose, he would not have asked for Erroll."

A laugh from Dorina put his surmises for the time to flight.

"The idea of associating robbery with a gentleman like that," she said. "Why, even the swell mob could not muster half his respectability. Take my word for it, he is some English Lord or Duke *incognito*, who, wishing to become acquainted with our Irish manners and customs, has taken this opportunity of doing so; or, more likely still, he is a Fenian, a head centre, who, wishing to feel how the pulse of this part of the nation beats, throws a stray hint here and there among those simple people for that purpose. Yes, positively, that is it; and, for want of

a better name, I shall call him Head-centre Rossa. Yet, no, that renowned gentleman might be displeased, so I shall call him—Head-centre Incognito instead.”

They entered the barn as she spoke; and very pretty it looked, with its flags and wreaths, its natural flowers and hundred lights, all of Dorina’s own contrivance. No lady going into her ball-room in the midst of luxury, wealth, and art, could have felt prouder than she did as she entered that humble place, leaning on the arm of Lynmore Desmond.

“You are the ruling genius of this fairy scene,” he whispered, with that covert flattery which is innate in all mankind.

They were still standing near the door, good-naturedly criticising every one and everything, when Dorina’s attention was arrested by a figure that suddenly appeared on the threshold. It was Milly; and, forgetful of even Lynmore’s detaining hand, she hastened towards her, shocked and frightened at her pallor.

“Where is Mrs. Desmond?” asked Miss Sarsfield, looking wildly round the room.

“On the lawn, I think. What is the

matter?" But, without waiting for an answer, Dorina, seeing that Lynmore had not noticed Miss Sarsfield, returned, and bade him wait till she rejoined him. She feared that something dreadful had occurred to his mother, and wished to spare him until she ascertained what it could be.

"What is the matter?" she repeated more eagerly, as she returned to Mildred.

"I do not know—I cannot tell," replied the trembling girl, still more wildly looking about. "Oh! Dorina, where is his mother? Help me to find her."

"Has anything occurred to Mr. Desmond?"

"Yes, he has fainted; he is very ill. He looks as if he were dying."

Without waiting for any further explanation, Dorina caught Milly's hand, and compelled her to point out the place she sought, for the poor girl seemed incapable of thought or action herself. It was not far; it was to the fern grotto, where she had seen them both so happy not an hour ago—the fern grotto, where Mildred and her betrothed had lingered to form plans for their future, and where Dorina found Walter now lying on that same rustic bench, so white and still,

that she only wondered how Milly had kept so calm.

"Is it a faint?" Miss Sarsfield asked, fearfully.

"If it be, it is a dreadful one," returned Dorina, in the same hushed tone of awe. "I hear a running brook—bring some water."

"It is of no use. Think you that I could have left him without trying that and everything else? Oh! what is it, Dorina? Surely, surely it could not be death?"

"Heaven forbid! No, no, that were too terrible! it is some horrid lethargy; something worse than a faint; and we must lose no more time in summoning medical aid. Do you hear? Medical aid at once."

But Miss Sarsfield did not hear; she only threw her arms over Walter, and called frantically on his name. But there was no response to those entreaties; none, indeed, except from the weird echoes of the grotto. She withdrew her arms at last, and looked piteously on the marble-like features.

"Oh, how cold he is! Walter, my darling, wake up—wake up!"

"This is useless, Miss Milly, and but waste

of precious moments. Fly to his mother. But, no, the fright would kill her. Seek Lynmore or Erroll, and bid one or the other hasten for Dr. Ernest. Run for your life—collect yourself. Do you not hear?”

“I—yes, I hear. Is Walter dead?”

“He will be so if you delay. Or shall I go myself?”

“No, you will be more useful to him than I shall. What, what am I to do?”

“Find either Erroll or Lynmore—any one, in fact, who will go the quickest for the doctor.”

Scarcely waiting for Dorina to finish the last sentence, the wretched girl ran from the grotto on her hurried mission.

Once alone, Dorina placed her hand over the man's heart, stooped her lips close to his, but could detect neither pulse nor breath. She rubbed his hands, and made every other effort to rouse and revive him, but of no avail; the heir of Castlethomond lay, to all appearance, a stiffening corpse before her. But she could not believe it—it was too terrible to die in the midst of all the life and gaiety that surrounded him—too terrible to be summoned to his last account without a

moment's warning, and with his heart so full of love for an earthly idol.

Surely it must have been some extraordinary caprice of the brain that made Dorina think of the stranger at such a moment as that—the stranger whom she and Lynmore had met not very far from that place. She asked herself, if Walter were really dead, had the man with the cloak and slouched hat anything to do with it. Was Mr. Desmond murdered, and could that man have committed the atrocious deed? But then she saw there was no sign of violence, and was not Milly by his side when the fit came on him? What did it mean, that horrid lethargy which the girl, almost frantic now with terror, exhausted so much strength in trying to arouse him out of? But all was fruitless, and weary at last she desisted from her efforts, and could do nothing more than gaze helplessly at the still figure lying on the rustic bench.

Gradually the fascination for what appals us took such possession of her, that she could not remove her gaze from the glassy eyes that looked so vacantly into hers. She fancied herself drawn nearer and nearer

to those ghastly features, and felt that she was powerless to resist or withdraw herself from them. And this horrible feeling might have worked longer and deeper on her imagination had not a hand been laid upon her shoulder, and, starting round, she found herself face to face with Erroll Desmond.

CHAPTER XI.

FROM THE IDEAL TO REALITY.

RELEASED from the thrall of the fascination which rivetted her gaze to Walter's countenance, Dorina's first emotion was joy at having a living being near her, and, obeying the impulse natural to that feeling, she almost clung to Erroll, who was only too willing to construe the action into what best suited his own vanity.

He murmured some passionate words, but at their sounds she shuddered, and, shrinking back, pointed to the figure lying on the bench, draped with fern and ivy leaves.

She believed Mildred had sent him there, and that Lynmore had gone for Dr. Ernest.

"He has fainted—how bad he looks," said Erroll, peering down into the shadows, for the moonlight which now illuminated every other cranny of the fern grotto, threw but a faint

reflection near the wooden bench. "How still he is. So like a dead man," he continued, bending nearer, and shaking his brother in quick alarm. Then, turning to Dorina, he espied the bracelet which her godfather had given her, and, taking it roughly off her arm, held the plain gold part close to the white lips; but there was no breath to mar its brightness.

"It is a faint from which he will never recover—it is death!" whispered Erroll, shivering with awe.

"It cannot be!—no, it cannot be!" cried Dorina, again dashing some water she had squeezed from the dripping moss down on Walter's face. But he made no sign.

"It is death," went on Erroll; and now his hot breath fanned her cheek. "Death, Dorina! Do you know the meaning of that word?"

"It cannot be!—no, it cannot be!" she replied distractedly, and taking no notice of his question.

"It is. I have been a long time watching for it. I am not surprised, although I am sorry it has come so soon. Yes, it is death. Ah! how you ignore what I want you to understand. I tell you it is death!"

But she would not believe it.

"Yes, I tell you it is death!" he persisted, as though he only cared to convince her of that fact. "Heed me, Dorina. Walter Desmond is dead, and I am the heir of Castlethomond."

Dorina looked at him reproachfully, but made no reply.

"I knew he would die thus some day," explained Erroll; "I always knew it, for I have seen him suffer, and marked each pain he bore, as you, Dorina, might count the grains of sand run through an hour-glass. But my interest was different to what yours would have been, for the man who watches for his power is not like the girl who watches for her amusement. But I see that you are still obdurate, and will not understand me."

"Did you never summon medical assistance when you saw him suffer?" Dorina asked the question, but, without waiting for an answer, added, "And here am I wasting time without that very assistance now."

She was flying from the grotto as she spoke, but he sprang forward and detained her.

"No aid can save him now," he said, hurriedly; "it was heart disease that killed him

he has suffered from it for years; he was ill all day, and I suppose some excitement or other brought on this last attack. I tell you, darling, that he is dead, and I am the heir of Castlethomond."

"You can't be such a monster as to gloat over a brother's death for that reason?"

"No, not for that reason; but because it makes you mine."

With a gesture of impatience she endeavoured to release her hand, which he had caught, but it was in a grasp of iron; and she was powerless to stir, except to place the other hand, for protection, as it were, on what she now knew was a stiffening corpse beside her.

"Listen, Dorina; here, in the presence of the dead, I swear I am sorry for having offended you as I did last night. Speak to me. Can you forgive me, and be my wife?"

"Mr. Desmond, it is horrible, it is cruel of you to speak such words at such a time as this. Let me go. I must seek a physician for your brother. Oh, if Miss Sarsfield would but come back."

"Hush! speak not of Milly. You must make me a promise, for I will not let you quit this

spot until you do. Dorina, will you be my wife now that I can make you rich and happy?"

"No; if you could make me a queen I would not marry you. The very fact of your detaining me here like this makes me look upon you with loathing. Release my hand, I entreat, I implore you—release my hand, I command you."

He relaxed his hold but slightly as he answered, in a clear voice,—“Dorina, I have set my heart upon you, and it is no idle jest for a man like me to set his heart upon anything, for he is sure to win it. Do what you will, you must be mine—you know it, you feel it; so there is no use in trying to escape. But I would rather that you came to me in love than in anger. Promise to marry me and you shall leave me on this instant.”

“I will not promise, for I could not keep my word.”

“You shall, you must. Think of what you are saying, and remember that I can be a bitter enemy.”

“I know what I am saying, and I know that you are a coward to threaten a defenceless woman thus.”

“You do not seem to fear me, yet, Dorina;

I found you here with my dead brother alone, in this most lonely place. What account would you give of yourself if you were suspected of his murder?"

She smiled scornfully at his miserable attempt to frighten her, and again endeavoured to free her hand.

"How beautiful you look in your anger. Do you know, child, that your very coldness warms my heart with deeper passion for you? Make that promise, and I will no longer act the unnatural part you now compel me to act, for, callous as I seem, it is hard even for me to plead to you here beside my brother's corpse; but you outwitted me last evening in the ruins, and I swear you shall not do so a second time."

"I will not promise, though every moment you keep me here should be an age of misery,—though the very touch of your hand is as loathsome to me as that of a reptile. No, I would not make a promise that I could not keep, though the choice were between it and death as I thus stand before you."

"Then am I vanquished. Dorina, you are free."

He released her at last, yet she did not

leave him, for something in his aspect compelled her to remain, while he added, "I see you suspect me still—even perhaps suspect me of contriving a mock marriage; but you are wrong—that is too hackneyed for me. I was mad enough to think that the fervency of my passion could not fail to make you return it; but I am sane now, and, loving you all the same, bid you go your way."

She turned to obey, but on looking back she lingered again, for he had stooped over the rustic bench, and kneeling down had flung his arms wildly over his dead brother. She saw the bench shake, and believed that he wept. Then, with a prayer in her heart, and tears streaming down her pale cheeks, she left the grotto to seek Walter's mother and his betrothed wife.

But she had not gone many paces when—she began to waver. What had she done! what a chance had she thrown away! Walter was dead, and Erroll was the heir; he had asked her to be his wife, and she had repelled him. No doubt of his honour now crossed her mind; she firmly believed all that he had said; for was he not his own master, and at liberty to follow the bent of his own inclina-

tions? Was it not the very truth of his passion that made him plead his suit with such a shock so fresh upon him? What a fool she had been. And now regret took the place of sorrow in her breast. She forgot the blow that was in store for Milly and Mrs. Desmond,—she forgot everything in the world but the sting of self-reproach for having stifled her ambition, and having allowed herself to be carried away by her better feelings.

In this bitter mood she saw Lynmore, who was evidently looking for her; and, her good angel coming back again, she was all sympathetic kindness by the time he reached her side.

“What is wrong with you, Dorina; your face is stained with tears?” he said, eagerly. But she averted that face and trembled.

“What is wrong?” he again demanded, almost angrily.

“Mr. Lynmore, you must bear an awful shock. You must summon courage to feel a dreadful sorrow.”

“My mother?”

“Fear not for her, you will have to sustain her in this hour of trial. Remember this, Mr. Lynmore, you will have to sustain and

comfort your mother now. Will you do this, sir?"

"I will, I will. What is it all about? Tell me, for mercy's sake, at once."

"Master Walter is ill; it is a sudden and violent attack. A dangerous spasm of the heart, or something worse than that."

"He is dead! Walter is dead!"

She spoke not, but her silence answered for her.

"It cannot be, surely it cannot be?" he said, as Dorina and Milly had said before him, with that resisting to believe in a terrible fact which always prompts us to cry out in our anguish—"It cannot be."

"You must bear this manfully, Mr. Lynmore, and you must not lose your presence of mind, for recollect what the consequence might be if your mother came to hear it from some careless person. Your brother lies dead in the fern grotto. Rouse yourself, sir, and go to her. Break this gently, kindly to her; no one can do it better."

But Lynmore was stunned, and could do nothing but stare at Dorina.

"I saw your mother just now going into the barn. Some one will tell her of her son's

death there—some one who does not love her, and can feel no pity for her. Spare her that, sir ; spare her that.”

“And Milly, does she know?”

“I will see to her, only you must go to your mother now.”

He went, and found Mrs. Desmond where Dorina had told him, in the barn, endeavouring to take an interest in the merriment of the merry people about her.

She smiled as he entered, and that smile made his task harder to perform. It was so seldom that those sad lips bore one, so seldom he had seen his mother released from pain and suffering, that he stood behind her chair unable to broach the terrible subject. He felt inclined to run to the grotto and see for himself if this thing were really true ; but then some one might tell his mother in his absence, and Dorina's manner bore conviction with it.

“Are you not tired, mother?” he forced himself to say at length.

“No, dear. These people amuse me ; and Moila has just been here, giving me such a grotesque description of the fun on the lawn that I did not feel the time slip by.”

"Had you not better come away? You are so unaccustomed to this kind of excitement, that I fear it will not serve you."

"Not yet, dear. Sir William Heatherington promised to bring Moila back to show me some rare specimens of fern from the grotto."

The grotto! Surely he had heard Dorina mention something about the grotto, which, in anxiety for his mother, was almost forgotten. In an instant what that something was flashed vividly before him; it was there his brother lay dead. Moila would be back with the dreadful news, and his mother would learn it from her. He almost wished that such would be the case. He had so much faith in Moila's gentle nature, no one could reveal the terrible tidings like her, whose sympathetic heart was full of love and tenderness towards all.

Despising himself for these thoughts, Lynmore again addressed his mother.

"I am so out of sorts, have such a headache, that if it were not selfish, I would ask you to come home."

She was up from her chair before he finished the last sentence, with so much anxiety in her face, that he felt he had made a sad bungle of

it. Everything seemed to increase his difficulty, and, scarcely knowing what he did, he drew her arm within his own and brought her from the scene of festivity, which somehow seemed to aggravate his misery.

Once in the open air, his courage revived a little.

"Mother, darling," he murmured, "is not this kind of thing very wearying? Life is so short, so fleeting, that one ought not to care for such things at all."

"It must be your headache which put you into such a melancholy mood, my dear. Is it better? Let me look fully at you. Lynmore, dear, how pale you are."

"My heart is sad. I have borne a great sorrow, mother. Will you bear it with me?"

"All your sorrows and your joys are mine. What is it, Lynmore?"

"I have just heard of an old friend's death—a very dear friend's death. But here are a couple of chairs. Sit down, mother—rest your head upon my shoulder, thus. Now let me tell you."

Tenderly, and with gentleness, if not with much adroitness, he told her all; and she bore it in a manner that surprised him.

“Walter is dead!” she murmured.

For a time she seemed only conscious of the bitterness of the words without fully realizing their meaning. Then she added, suddenly,—

“Dead! Great mercy! This is terrible! And Erroll, what is to be done with Erroll? Surely Heaven cannot avenge my poor girl’s wrongs like this? No, no, no; that would be the punishment descending on an innocent head. But come, let us go to Walter.”

She spoke those strange and incoherent words so quietly, that Lynmore supposed her brain had received a shock, and that her mind was wandering; but her manner contradicted such a supposition, for after the first few moments it was collected and almost stern, as though it partook of either great terror or despair.

CHAPTER XII.

MISCONSTRUED.

THE guests had left the Castle, and the grief which wrapped it in gloom extended its darkness to Clonshavale. The widowed heart of Miss Sarsfield was bowed to the dust in this her first great sorrow, and all her uncle's efforts were of no avail to cheer her; for what comfort could he offer, except the loving sympathy of his kind old heart? And the poor girl had to bear her bereavement as best she could, and teach herself that hardest of all lessons to our human nature—"Thy will be done."

To Dorina had fallen the sad task of convincing her of Walter's death, and it took a long time to press that fact upon her. She insisted on being brought to her betrothed, she clung to his lifeless body, and called to him in frantic pleading, refusing to leave him,

until she was carried away senseless. An illness followed, during which Dorina never left Clonshavale, and seldom quitted the side of the suffering girl, even for the rest without which her strength would have given way.

Moila, too, had been unremitting in her attention. But it was to Dorina that Milly had looked for what she wanted. Never until then had she shown a preference for either of the girls, whom she had known since childhood; but there was now a link between Dorina and herself, a link which could not be easily severed. She had been with her through all that terrible trial; and now that health was somewhat restored, she was her companion always. She accompanied her to the old churchyard, where they stayed for hours beside the marble tomb that covered Walter, and she shared all her solitary rambles, doing what was possible to lighten the burden of the poor girl's heavy grief.

This was the most unhappy time of Moila's life. She felt herself a very useless thing, or she would not be so completely thrust aside at Clonshavale. Then she knew that Lynmore suffered, and that she feared to speak

one kindly word to cheer him. How her true heart yearned to pour its depths of friendship upon him—yearned so painfully, that she had to take refuge in a cold reserve, which hurt and repelled him, sending him to seek sympathy from Dorina, who did not deny it!

But Moila had her own reasons for thus avoiding Lynmore; and no one should inquire into them too closely. The change at Clonshavale was not the only one she watched with a jealous eye, for Dorina now seemed to treat her with a coldness she could but ill brook, because she felt it to be undeserved. Doubt of her sister's affection soon grew into suspicion of her nature, and she asked herself if her kindness towards Miss Sarsfield was sincere. Would her sister have remained up night after night beside her sick bed if Lynmore Desmond did not know and feel that kindness in the innermost recesses of his heart?—for every attention shown to his dead brother's betrothed bride was warmly appreciated by him. Would she have gone daily to that secluded tomb with the mourning girl had not Lynmore accompanied them? Had not his unremitting devotion been a

pleasant study and another excuse for loving him?

Moila doubted Dorina for the first time, and that deepened the source of her own uneasiness; for to doubt at all even one much less beloved than her sister, was very bitter to the truth of Moila's simple nature.

In such a frame of mind every trifling annoyance magnified itself into a wrong. Even Toby's querulous complaints were not to be borne; and, oblivious of her usual small grain of comfort, she left him now to finish them to the winds, or to whatever else he chose. This change of Moila's treatment of him of course made Toby more dissatisfied with his lot than ever, and set him to watch its cause more warily than he had watched before. The young girl could not take a walk even in her own garden that those lynx eyes were not following her; for morning, noon, and night the poor foundling was haunted by a dread of some evil happening to his master's daughters; and, like a faithful dog, he was for ever on the watch to guard or save them.

One day, as usual, Moila had taken her

book and went off on one of her quiet rambles. Toby, true to his post, was not far off, although hitherto his watchfulness seemed useless, for she had never been molested. This day, however, he saw Lynmore Desmond making towards her, and, with a sudden thought, he darted through the ruined abbey, and threw himself in the young gentleman's way, making a well-feigned bow of surprise when he accosted him.

"Good day, Downs. How are all at Rosmary?"

"Well, I thank your honour, barrin' the bit o' grief at the Castle."

"It is kind of them to feel with us so truly."

"And who wouldn't, sir? Wasn't Masther Walter loved by rich and poor alike? The blessed angels make his bed this day in heaven."

Though it was not Lynmore's creed to believe that the angels would thus add to his brother's comfort, he bowed his head in respect to humble Toby's prayer.

"Ye's are a good family, all o' you, and no scoffers or ridiculers of the likes o' me, but always havin' a willin' ear and an

open purse for the poor. Fine landlords to the tenantry you be; and I hope that Mr. Erroll will continue the honour o' the line, and follow the example of those that went before him. But he is a wild one, is Masther Erroll, and I doubt him sadly,—your pardon, sir, for saying so in your presence, but I can't help a doubtin' him, because you know he has set his heart upon Miss Moila, and it 'ill be a shame for him if he doesn't make a wife o' her simply because she isn't a born lady."

"You are mistaken, it is Miss Dorina he most admires; and the only shame in the matter is that you could think a Desmond capable of wooing a girl he would not marry."

"Your pardon, sir, and for still a contradictin' o' you; it is Miss Moila he is after; and every girl likes to get a great match, although for the matter o' winnin' the colleen's heart, he may spare himself the trouble, for she wouldn't care a pin about him, even if he paved the floor with diamonds for her to walk over. No, nor Sir William Heatherington neither needn't come a courtin' to her, as he did ever since the

harvest-home; but him she gave the good-bye to."

"Then Sir William has actually been visiting Rosmary?"

Toby did not hesitate in uttering the falsehood regarding the young baronet.

"In course he has, sir. But there's only one she cares a thraneen for, and that one is the young gentleman who is a credit to our village,—I mean the young lawyer, Mr. Charles Rochfort."

If this were a trap of Toby's cunning to find out the state of Lynmore's heart, it was a successful one, apparently at all events, for he fell into it body and bones. His face flushed to the roots of his hair, and he lost all presence of mind as he said,—

"You do not mean to tell me that Miss Moila and Rochfort—"

He could get no further, for something in his throat seemed to stop his speech.

"I mean to tell you that if ever she marries she will marry Mr. Rochfort. And why not, sir; he is her equal, and as fine a fellow as the country holds?"

"True, true; you are quite right; but I never dreamed of this. I have been a selfish

dunderhead, and, and—have you good reasons for believing what you tell me? I never saw them much together.”

“ Ah, sir. Why? Because you prevented them; and that is the long and the short o’ it. You kept him away, because he were jealous o’ you. I saw it all long ago, and what I didn’t see I heard from his sister’s servant, who is a courtin’ of a chum o’ mine, the boots at the village inn; so it’s all thrue, sir. But I am a loiterin’ as usual in place o’ goin’ about my business. Good-day, and kindly, sir.”

The foundling touched his hat and went on his make-believe business. But on looking back and finding that instead of taking his hint Lynmore was again making straight for Moila, he hid behind a hedge to watch, as usual.

The young girl was seated on a green mound, idly toying with her book. As Desmond approached, she rose, and waited for him to join her; but neither spoke a word of greeting, only turned, as by simultaneous consent, towards the ruins.

During that silence her eyes sought his face uneasily; but it was always averted, and its sad expression reproached her coldness.

towards him more than words could have done. But looking at him thus, with her heart full of sisterly affection, she was not prepared for the manner in which he addressed her.

“Moila, I have been a great idiot, and I do not wonder at your hating me,” he said, abruptly.

She turned upon him such a look of surprise, that he could not help smiling.

“I have never kept a secret back from you,” he added; “but what have you hidden away in your heart from me?”

“Nothing, sir; nothing that would be worth your knowing.”

“Worth my knowing! What an estimate you must have formed of my friendship! What is there which concerns you in the slightest that would not be of interest to me? You should know this before now,—you must know it; and yet you would not trust me.”

“With what? I cannot understand you.”

“Your engagement to young Rochfort.”

Moila turned very pale, but she answered stoutly,—

“I could not speak of what never existed.

Mr. Rochfort and I are nothing to each other. What made you think of such a thing?"

"That, perhaps, I am not at liberty to tell; but if there be any truth in the report, do not keep it longer from me. Tell it as freely as if I were your brother."

"Why should I not, indeed? Believe me, Mr. Lynmore, I would do so, if there was any secret to tell, but there is not."

"Then Mr. Rochfort and you—"

"Are nothing to one another."

"Why were you so cold lately? Why did you avoid me?"

Moila could not answer now. She became sadly embarrassed, and Lynmore, not wishing to distress her further, changed the subject at once.

"I have persuaded mother to accompany poor Mildred and her uncle when they go abroad, which will be in a short time now. Of course I go too, but Erroll is determined to remain."

"I am sorry for it, as I told you before, sir. I do not like his attention to Dorina, who, although Miss Sarsfield begs very hard for her to go abroad with them, does not seem inclined to leave Rosmary."

"I understood it to be a settled affair that she was to go, and that your father wished it."

"No, it was never settled; and although he wishes it, she does not like it herself. Do you think Mr. Erroll will go to London when you leave?"

"I hope not. His London escapades always end badly, and with trouble to us all."

"I dread his remaining."

"You need not, Moila. You should know the Desmonds better than to dread anything that even their wild Erroll could do. Do you believe there are any people in the world, or even one person, who dreads and dislikes my attention to you?"

"Doubtless; but that is because they know nothing of the bond that unites us."

"Lady Ada?"

"Yes, Lady Ada, the best and sweetest lady in the universe."

"As you are 'the kindest. But for you, Moila, how miserable would have been her life and mine!"

"Is Lord Grayston as yet invulnerable?"

"Yes; I dare not go near the manor. He

says his daughter must marry a nobleman, and that Lynmore Desmond has no chance of her, because he is not the heir of Castlethomond. Is it not hard, Moila?"

"It is, sir; but Lady Ada's truth will compensate for all."

"A fact. And now, can you manage to give her this letter? It is to ask her to meet me at our usual trysting-place before I go abroad."

"Certainly I can, for I shall be at the manor this evening on business for my father."

As Lynmore was handing her the letter, Charles Rochfort, suddenly emerging from the ruins, passed them with the coldest bow of recognition. He had not heard a word of the conversation, for, like many other wayfarers, he had crossed the fields, and merely took the abbey for shortness; but he saw Moila receive the letter, and that was enough.

Neither took any notice of the occurrence, and immediately afterwards Lynmore left her, as abruptly as though she had offended him. She entered the ruins alone, and stood watching the two young men with the keenest anxiety. She saw them meet, but only for a

second, for Rochfort, with a deep bow, struck into the fields in another direction, and went off towards the village. She guessed what that meant, and knew that Lynmore had left her for the purpose of showing the other that she was alone. But the little plot did not succeed, and the girl stood looking after the man she loved in hopes that he would return. But he did not even look back ; and as his figure receded those hopes receded too, until both were lost to heart and sight. Then she felt the darkness of despair was gathering over her and she sank upon a stone in utter misery.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STRANGER.

WHILE Moila gave herself up to grief in the old ruins, she of course imagined herself alone, but it was a delusion; a man stood a little apart, watching her with an amused smile lurking about his lips, and an expression of contempt shining out of his mocking eyes, that made him look almost like a demon laughing at human suffering—it was the person whom Dorina had jestingly christened the “Head-centre Incognito” at the harvest-home.

He wore the same hat and cloak which Lynmore had then remarked, the former pulled more over his brows, perhaps, and the latter wrapped more closely about him, as though to protect him from cold. During the struggle which shook poor Moila’s heart he seemed to be labouring under a difficulty of restraining

a fit of laughter ; but when she raised her head and found that there had been a witness to her sorrow, his ready tact and courteous salutation not only covered her confusion, but set her at ease immediately.

"I presume yonder large building is a castle," he said, pointing in the direction indicated, and looking right away from her.

She answered simply in the affirmative, for she was in no mood to satisfy any one's curiosity, much less this man's, whom she knew nothing about.

"And that house half hidden in the trees, to the left yonder, can you tell me to whom does it belong ?"

"That is Clonshavale, sir."

As Moila spoke now, the stranger took off his hat, and held it in his hand ; yet he did not look at her, and she felt grateful for what she took to be a delicacy of feeling on his part.

"And that place nearer to us, with the lattice window at one side, and the green porch at the other ?"

"Is Rosmary. It belongs to Mr. M'Dermott, my father."

The stranger turned to her now, and Moila started back with an ejaculation of surprise.

Replacing his hat, he murmured something about the cold setting in so soon after harvest; but still her eyes were rivetted upon him, and she seemed lost in the effort of recalling some memory.

"You have not told me what that Castle is, Miss M'Dermott. Its name, I mean."

"Castlenthomond, sir. But the family are in great affliction, and it looks very dismal, shut up as it is now."

"Yes, I heard something about the heir dying suddenly. Heart disease, I think they said?"

"Yes, it was very sad."

"Very."

The way in which that one word was uttered grated upon Moila's ear, and she felt her dislike for the man beside her increasing every moment.

"Is the present heir likely to be as popular as his predecessor?"

"It would be hard to say: time alone can prove it."

With a slight movement of adieu, Moila endeavoured to cut the conversation short here; but the strange gentleman was evidently of a different mind.

had seen him before. Then the half-formed recollection of who he was, or whom he resembled, would vanish, and she became again bewildered. But now, with nothing to disturb her memory, she turned her thoughts to the past, and smiled at the conceit of believing that she had ever seen that face before.

At Rosmary Farm the routine of life went on like clockwork; but when Moila arrived, she found that the machinery was for once out of order. Dinner had been delayed on her account, and the farmer was cross about it. However, she took her place at the table, and with exemplary patience endeavoured to partake of the choice pieces her mother put upon her plate, but suddenly throwing down her knife and fork, she clasped her hands together and cried out,—

“I have it. I have it; it was at the harvest-home, and no place else.”

The consternation of those present might have recalled her to a more circumspect behaviour, had not her excitement made her so oblivious of it that she repeated again and again, “It was at the harvest-home; indeed it was,”—until Mrs. M'Dermott, thumping

her on the back, as mothers do to choking infants, said,—

“Are you crazy, child? See, you are throwing about the gravy, and tossing the salt all over your plate!”

But Moila, with the exception of the former, committed no such depredation, and soon appeared calm again.

“I was thinking,” she explained, “thinking so horribly of where I could have seen that man before, that I forgot everything else; but now I fancy it was at the harvest-home, and yet I am not half satisfied about it. Surely I must have seen him some place else long ago, for the remembrance of him is like a dim picture we see in a dream. I see him standing out from the shadows of the past, but cannot recognize him. Mother, do you recollect a tall man, with a broad rather than a high forehead; eyes dark and liquid in their beauty; a voice, the softness—yet no, it was not soft, though peculiarly low-toned, the kind of voice which is most persuasive; a voice like—whose shall I say?”

“The Devil!” cried the farmer, pushing away his plate, and staring at his daughter in amazement.

"It is all the branches," said his wife, un-
easily. "I told you so. I told you it would
come to this. With your Italian, and French,
and nonsense, the girl's brain is turned."

A wild ringing laugh from Moila inter-
rupted her; and for the first time in her life
Mrs. M'Dermott witnessed a fit of hysterics,
which was such a new phase of suffering to
her, that at first she was inclined to join in
it, but then became so frightened that she
fled from the room.

When Moila recovered, her first thought
was of her mother. She knew that something
unusual had come over her, and that it was
not fainting, for she herself had heard the first
unearthly laugh that had startled her parents;
yet she had no power to control it, for it was
neither fine-ladyism or temper on her part,
as some very worldly-wise people persist in
calling hysteria.

Mrs. M'Dermott returned immediately, and
drawing the young head down upon her
bosom, soothed the fitful sobs as she had
soothed them in childhood; then Moila, feel-
ing that comfortable, safe kind of feeling,
which we all have felt in that haven of rest,
became tranquil at last.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SECRET MEETING.

THE stranger, standing in the shadow of the ruins, watched Moila depart with the same cynical smile with which he had watched her weep a short time previously; and when he saw her enter the house he laughed, as he muttered,—

“Poor fool—a girl with a heart: pity she should burden herself with such a cumbersome commodity. Her sister does not do so—not she: Dorina has more sense. If I am any judge of character she is ambitious, and, to my thinking, would not be over-scrupulous for its attainment. I wonder what all the crying business was about? And what has Lynmore to do with it? Has he been stealing away that child’s affections? I suppose so. Well, well, thus the world goes round. And Mildred, she too was going over the beaten path to matrimony. I wonder if it

were really the fact about her and Erroll? But, no; even to me it sounds impossible. Strange that Walter should have made his exit from life's stage so inopportunist. Bad thing for Erroll—bad thing for me, too, I expect. I wonder what Sir Capel is doing at this moment? By-the-bye, what moment is it? Six o'clock. Just ten minutes' walk to the Castle, thus allowing myself to be a quarter of an hour late."

Dorina's duties at Clonshavale being neither very pleasant or congenial, wearied her in spite of her really kind nature. She was weary of looking at the sorrow-stricken face of Milly, and of listening to the monotonous conversation of the old baronet. When, therefore, an opportunity offered of releasing herself from both, it was not to be wondered at if she was glad to avail herself of it. It was refreshing to go out into the garden, or to take a walk over to Rosmary—anything, in fact, to relieve the monotony of the gloomy home in which she lived since Walter's death, like a caged bird panting for its liberty.

At the very moment that Moila had parted from the stranger in the ruins, Dorina was setting out for one of her constitutional walks,

as she called them. She meant only to ramble through the grounds of Clonshavale, but some impulse tempted her to go to the Castle, to inquire for Mrs. Desmond. Accordingly, for that purpose she set off at a brisk rate, in order not to be too long from Mildred, and did not slacken her pace until she found herself in the demesne.

Striking into a by-path, which she fancied would bring her at once near the entrance, she found that it only led to the shrubbery, through which she would have to pass before she reached even the carriage-way. As she stood to look about her, wondering why she had never come that way before, she heard the sound of stealthy footsteps near her, and, impelled by curiosity, she went closer to the fence that divided it from where she stood, and was astonished to see Mrs. Desmond coming forward to meet a man who wore a cloak and a broad-leafed hat.

“Head-centre Incognito, as I live,” thought Dorina; “and but for the presence of Mrs. Desmond I could fancy that if I kept very still I might find out some plot or intrigue against the Government,—not that I would become either an informer or a spy, though

certainly at this moment I do look like one. But how silent they are, they have not even bowed to one another. What a fiendish smile he wears on that handsome mouth of his. I hate eaves-dropping, but I do wish they would say something. Ah! I knew there was some mischief brewing in that Head-centre fellow. But Mrs. Desmond. What has she to say to him? How wretched the poor lady looks! What a sweet sad face is hers!"

"What can you want with me?" uttered the timid voice of the invalid. "It is so seldom I come out that I may be missed."

"Is your wrath so bitter against me, that you would not let me even touch your hand?"

Dorina saw that Mrs. Desmond shuddered and recoiled a little at this implied request, but took no notice of it.

"Are you so unforgiving?" he added. "Surely one friendly word is not too much to ask?"

"What do you want?" she asked, in a voice so sharp that the listener did not recognize it for the gentle one she was accustomed to.

"Money," he replied, sullenly.

"Will you leave this place at once, then?"

It is not only for your own sake that you should do so. And do not go to Clonshavale. Will you do this if I give you whatever you require?"

"I would not take your money."

"Did you not say that that was what you wanted with me?"

"No. I said I wanted money, but did not say I wanted it from you."

"What, then? You know it is not safe for you to linger here. For myself, of course, I do not care."

"The business I came about can be deferred, for now you look as if you were about to faint. Are you so very delicate as I hear, Lucy?"

"Yes. I am dying thus for years. But tell me what I can do for you?"

"Never mind, I am really concerned about your health, and hope that my wrongdoings, the one wrongdoing that I was guilty of, had nothing to do with this delicacy. I know it brought terrible grief and suffering here, and I know of old that you always made mountains out of mole-hills."

"Your sophistry is an insult. Tell me what brought you here, and let me go."

"I know that you have cause to curse and hate me; but the heart must be made of adamant that cannot forgive a wrong when the offender is repentent."

"Was it to tell me this you brought me here?"

"It was not."

The stranger's speech was cut short by the sound of voices in the carriage-way, and Mrs. Desmond made a movement to depart, but his outstretched hand detained her.

"Let us part as friends."

Dorina saw that now Mrs. Desmond did not refuse her hand, but the effort to give it was a mortal agony to her; for, withdrawing it from the unwelcome clasp as though a viper lay within it, she left the shrubbery without another word.

The voices which had interrupted this interview ceased, and Dorina watched until the stranger had departed, then returned to Clonshavale, sadder than when she left it.

She was baffled and mystified. Perhaps Head-centre disappointed her, for she could find out no conspiracy unless what she took to be a domestic one, and that she could not fathom.

CHAPTER XV.

AN OLD MEMORY REVIVED.

IF Erroll Desmond did not really regret his brother's death, he had the grace to assume an appearance that passed for the genuine article to all but one, and that one was his mother.

She knew that he secretly rejoiced at the access to fortune which Walter's untimely end had given him—knew that in his selfishness he would have rejoiced could he have put his foot on the necks of all who stood between him and his wishes.

No one knew Erroll so thoroughly as Mrs. Desmond: she knew him better than he knew himself; for she had made him her study from the hour of his birth. There had never been much affection between them; and this unnatural fact sprang chiefly from her own coldness towards him.

Many bitter memories connected with him haunted her more bitterly than ever now. She saw him as a child, whom strangers could not pass by without admiring; and remembered that their praise had been a dagger to her heart. She saw him run to her knee, and, twining his arm around her, call her mother, but she had only shuddered at his embrace. She saw him grow up to a noble-looking stripling, yet could take no kindly interest in him; and now, when he reigned in the place of her beloved Walter, the feeling she had borne him in childhood was augmented by that fact.

Had she shown any love for him even, Erroll might have been a better man, for in years gone by she had been the one thought of his wayward heart—the one object round which was centred his ambitious dreams. The name of “mother” had possessed a charm to keep him out of the coarser evils which the companions of his youth took pleasure in, but even that good influence passed away, and he grew up to man’s estate almost a selfish worldling.

Such might naturally be the result of careless training, but Mrs. Desmond had nothing

of that kind to reproach herself with, for he had shared the same advantages as Walter and Lynmore, with the exception of the one great difference in her love for them. Erroll's affection she had not only rejected but repulsed, and in this alone she felt that she had acted indiscreetly, if not worse.

Even in his schooldays Erroll had admired Dorina M'Dermott, and had spent more of his time at the farm than at the Castle. That admiration soon grew into a deep and passionate attachment, which, with the coquetry natural to her, she had first encouraged, then capriciously repelled. She grew cold and reserved where she had been kind and affectionate; but that very coldness only added fervency to his passion. He vowed to win her, and told her so; but she had never any reason to believe him much in earnest until the night she met him on her way to Clonshavale. Then his insult in the ruins showed her the reality of his words, and for that she hated him. Before they parted, however, on that memorable night he endeavoured to excuse himself, and asked her to become his wife: her virtuous scorn was appeased, but her ambition was aroused. Then the insult

was repeated, and she hated him more than ever.

At the harvest-home he again took advantage of their situation in the fern grotto, but the fact of his pleading his passion in the presence of his dead brother so repelled her, that she turned from him in contempt; but before she left the grotto she wavered, and regretted her rejection of him.

Since Walter's death, pity for Miss Sarsfield and a genuine kindness of heart made her appear colder than ever to him. However, past experience assured her that he was quite secure in her meshes, and that she need not fear to lose him. To add to her triumph, Lynmore became so devoted to her now, that she believed she had only to choose between ambition and love; and now that those two passions stood out vividly against the background of a comparatively humble position, Dorina paused before she would stretch out her hand for either.

If she chose love, she should not be mistress of Castlethomond, or own the power that such a position must give her; on the other hand, if she obeyed the promptings of her ambition, how could she feel for Lynmore the calm

affection that would be his just right from his brother's wife? To be the owner of Castlethomond had always been the summit of greatness to the simple minds of the inhabitants of Rosmary Farm; and now that one of its members had the chance of sharing that greatness, she actually hesitated to embrace it.

For a month or so after the terrible termination of the harvest-home, everything went on at Clonshavale with a monotony that was almost insupportable to Dorina. No event broke in upon the every-day routine of her existence, excepting, indeed, the one of Charles Rochfort suddenly disappearing from his home; and that, of course, was no event to her. But to Moila,—what was it to Moila? Talk of thunderbolts stunning or killing; surely there are little incidents occurring round us every moment which stun and kill the inner life as effectually as they do the outward one. Moila's heart was stricken with despair when Kathleen Rochfort told her that her brother had left his home, and that she did not ever expect to see him back again. He had gone without one farewell or a single word to

Moila that might have told of his boundless love for her. Pride had kept him silent, and jealousy had driven him away from country, home, and friends.

Of the monotony at Clonshavale, Dorina grew more impatient every day, particularly as Lynmore, with all his attention, had never committed himself to her; and she began to suspect that it was for Mildred's sake he spent so much of his time with her. She was drawn away from those thoughts, however, by the change that now fell upon her sister, for that which was perceptible to almost every one could not fail to force itself upon a mind which, however pre-occupied, had ever turned itself to her with true affection.

Many other trifles beside her growing pale and sad, which were no trifles to those who loved her, showed the change in Moila so plainly, that Dorina came to the determination of returning at once to Rosmary.

She had almost promised Mildred that if she could obtain her parents' consent she would accompany her abroad; but now she felt that her proper place was with her sister.

Yet Dorina did not want to make this appear a sacrifice of any beloved project on

her part, for she felt no inclination to travel; and the only thing that now perplexed her was, how she could reconcile Miss Sarsfield to her decision.

True to the impulse of her childhood, she believed that Sir Capel was the best person to take her out of her dilemma, and for that purpose she sought him in the library.

He was seated in his usual chair before the fire, busy with his papers—for almost every man will have papers, whether of business or not; but those were thrust aside as Dorina entered, and he asked anxiously if anything were wrong with Mildred. She had been his sole thought since the dreadful scene in the fern grotto, and he fancied that every one who approached him came with some evil tidings of her.

“You need not fear, sir; there is nothing wrong with Miss Sarsfield,” she said.

“Thank Heaven! though it would not surprise me if there was anything wrong, for the poor darling’s heart is broken, and life is all a blank to her now, I fear, Dorina.”

“Let us trust that Heaven is too merciful for that; peace will return even to her, and she will yet be happy. I feel confident that

after this journey you will find her improved, sir. Once abroad, she will be removed from the scenes which cannot fail to bring the remembrance of poor Mr. Walter always before her; and although she may not forget, she will become resigned and cheerful."

"You are always hopeful, my dear; but Milly is not one to overcome a sorrow easily; she is so tender, so sensitive, so true."

"The very attributes to make her rise above any selfish feeling of regret. Her love for you will be her surest help. Her wish to make you happy will rouse her to the effort; and, once striving for another, the thought of self will soon be conquered."

"You always cheer me, Dorina; indeed, I often wonder what we should have done without you. Ah, my child! it is only in the time of trouble that we know our friends. Even Moila fell away, but you were staunch and kind."

"Not one whit more so than my sister. But you see, sir, poor Miss Mildred prefers me; because I was more or less mixed up with her bitter sorrow, it made her understand me better. I think Moila feels unhappy because she can be of no use to Miss Sars-

field. There must be something on her mind to make her so different to what she was a short time back, and I cannot bear to see the change. Oh, godfather! I am very miserable about her."

"Sit down, Dorina; as you used to do long ago, and tell me all about it."

Dorina placed a stool at the old man's feet, and took her place upon it; but something in her attitude brought back another scene, and he uttered a sharp, but stifled cry.

"It was thus my Milly sat," he said. "Thus she turned her face to me the night she told me the innocent story of her love for Walter, and one week after that he was dead. Do not sit like that again, Dorina. Here, take your place beside me."

She obeyed, and he listened patiently to the simple outline of her doubts and fears regarding Moila; but by neither word or sign did she allow him a glimpse into her own heart.

"And so you think she loves Lynmore Desmond," he murmured, musingly; "and that he returns it? Well, my dear, why should that make her unhappy?"

He never once alluded to the difference in

their position, but simply turned his thoughts to the feelings of the young girl's heart.

"I cannot understand why it should be so," answered Dorina; "but she looks so wretched and ill, that mother is almost distracted about her. Father has done all he could for her, but it is of no use. Moila is either dying, or she has some great trouble on her mind. If she would even come here as she used to do, and tell you, then we might do something for her; but to see her droop and pine away, oh, godfather! it breaks my heart—indeed it does."

The old man mused in perplexity for a while, then said, cheerfully,—

"I think the best thing to be done is for you to gain her confidence."

"It would be quite impossible; she avoids me every time I go to the farm."

"Because lately you are so much estranged from it and her."

The conversation had now turned to the precise point Dorina wanted.

"Yes, I have been too much estranged, indeed," she murmured; "and I must make amends. You see, sir, that now it would be impossible for me to go away with Miss

Mildred ; indeed, I never wished to go at all, except for the one reason, that I could be of use to the poor young lady ; but that is impossible—I cannot leave Moila. Do you not think I am right ?”

Thus gradually she brought him round to her own way of thinking, and won his promise to make matters straight with Mildred.

“I am sure you are acting wisely after all,” he said, encouragingly ; “and Milly will believe so too when she understands your reason for remaining. So go back to Moila as soon as possible—indeed, the sooner the better, now that you have come to this determination ; resume your old manner towards your sister ; be with her as much as possible, without being intrusive ; open your heart to her, and hers will soon be open to you ; for where there is much love, coldness cannot last long ; and she is not a girl to shut out an affectionate sister from her confidence.”

“I will do so, and I trust that she will take me to her heart again, although I have not deserved it lately—I mean that I have remained too much apart from her. But I fear I have tired you, godfather, and will say

good-night now. I shall rise early, and be at the farm before breakfast."

"And if you do so, is it to be good-night or good-bye? We are going away so soon."

"I hate to say good-bye, and would rather leave it as it was."

"Which means that you are to retire as usual with a polite little curtsy; yet here am I so old that I may never return to Clonshavale alive."

"Oh, godfather!" and Dorina was kneeling before him in a second. He looked at her and smiled; then fondly stroking her hair, bent down and kissed her forehead.

"I have no foreboding of death as yet, my dear," he said, playfully; "however, you are not offended. Ah! Dorina, would you believe it, I never kissed but one woman's brow before except my Milly's."

"Offended, sir; how could I be? That I am not."

"Prove it, then?"

She rose, and, putting her arms round his neck, pressed her lips to his more fondly than she had ever pressed them to her father's. She had known and loved him from a child, and he understood her better than the bluff farmer

did. However, Dorina's reverence for both was boundless.

"And who was that woman, sir?" she asked, now leaning over the back of his chair, and looking archly at him.

He started, and turned round sharply; but the girl's face was very sweet and earnest, so he turned again in silence.

"Who was the woman you kissed beside Miss Milly and myself?"

"You do not want to laugh at an old man's folly? No. You are too good for that, Dorina, and some time I may tell you, but not now—not now; so go to bed. Good-night."

"Not until you tell me this much. Was it Miss Milly's mother?"

"No, indeed it was not; so now be off, child. I shall explain about Moila as soon as possible."

And, as if to give an opportunity for that explanation, Miss Sarsfield entered the room as Dorina left his chair. She was clad in deep mourning; etiquette alone prevented her adopting widow's weeds, for she felt her heart and life were widowed by Walter's loss as effectually as if the marriage-tie had bound them. Very pale she looked in those sable

robes, but the same love shone in her eyes, and the same girlish grace marked her every movement.

Mildred was unselfish and just, and would not try to influence Dorina for her own gratification, so it was arranged that the "Red Rose of the Vale" was to return to the farm on the following morning, and that there was to be no more leave-taking, for Mildred also hated to say good-bye.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE GLEN.

THE morning was clear, though frosty, as Dorina, looking more fresh and pretty than ever, walked briskly over the fields towards Rosmary Farm. The parting between Miss Sarsfield and herself did not seem to affect her spirits, for she looked as merry as if she were glad to be released from the gloomy thralldom of sympathy at Clonshavale.

The freshness of the early hour invigorated her,—the stillness of all around delighted her,—the very glittering of the dew upon the grass seemed to please her, for she smiled, as she looked from one object to another, as though in admiration of all she beheld.

She knew that through the ruins was her shortest way; but not wishing to arrive before the family were up, and having a desire to

extend her walk, she took a path that led through a glen into her father's grounds.

The glen had always been a favourite resort in summer with Moila and herself; but now, in its autumnal beauty, she thought it more lovely than she ever remembered. The fading foliage, the little waterfalls rippling here and there, murmuring pleasantly through the shrubs, or falling boldly over the brown rocks into the stream beneath, all had a charm for her. She had never before visited the glen at such an early hour, and she fancied the familiar features of the rude scenery had somehow become almost new and strange to her. Surely there never were ferns and underwood trailing over that rock, nor were those tender creepers growing so abundantly on the very spot where now she stood; but this was all conceit, for the glen was quite the same as ever, but the caged bird was set free; Dorina was in her native element—happy, and she saw everything through the *couleur de rose*. In the very exuberance of her spirits, a song burst from her lips; but she was startled to hear her own voice in that quiet place, and desisted. Was it an echo that repeated the last bar she had sung? No,

echoes are true mimickers, and the voice that sang those few notes possessed not the silvery tone of hers. She listened attentively, and heard the breaking of some boughs in the distance ; then, for the first time, the loneliness of the place disagreeably affected her.

She had traversed about half-way now. Surely she was not mistaken, a footstep was following her—coming stealthily on the marshy ground, and avoiding the rocky path that she had taken. She paused, dreading to recede, yet fearing to go forward, for there the foliage thickened, and the solitude became more intense; there was nobody near, except the one to whom that footstep belonged, and she did not like to trust it. However, her versatile nature soon began to scoff at her alarm, and she resumed her walk unmolested until she got to where the trees met so thickly overhead that they almost shut out the blue sky above her; there the footsteps became more distinct, and on looking back she saw Erroll Desmond a short way from her.

It was their first meeting, except in the presence of others, since the memorable meeting in the fern grotto; and as Dorina

took one hurried glance around, her heart throbbed with a fear it had never known before.

"How early you are out, Miss M'Dermott," he said, carelessly, and joining her as though it were the most natural thing in the world for him to do.

"I might repeat those words to you, sir," she returned.

"So you are not going off with Mildred after all? No more am I. What are you listening for?"

"Did you not hear a whistle?"

"No; it may have been a thrush."

"There it is again. I am sure it is Toby. He is always about the glen."

"The whistle was from no human lips, and well you know it was not. Why do you pause?"

"I think I shall go back."

"That you shall not; nothing of the kind. Surely you are not afraid of me; I shall keep you safe even in this solitary place. You need not look cross; trust me for once, if possible."

"Still I am sure Toby Downs is here."

"Let him be; Dorina, you are a coward."

"That I am not." And still with that same fear in her heart she went on beside the man she dreaded, too proud to let him see his power over her.

Early as the hour was when Dorina left Clonshavale, all the inhabitants of Rosmary were astir; so she might not have feared to disturb them—indeed, fears of any kind had evidently vanished from her mind after meeting Mr. Desmond, for it was long after breakfast hour when she arrived. Moila was the first to see and run with open arms to receive her; but she was frightened at something in Dorina's face, and drew back without giving the kiss of welcome she had made such haste to bestow.

"Is Sir Capel or Miss Milly ill?" asked Moila, breathlessly.

"No, all are well at Clonshavale,"—and the voice which uttered the simple words fell with a chill on Moila's heart, it was so dry and hollow.

"Are you ill, then, darling? You look so pale. Surely it is not because you have parted for a short time from your friends that you look so miserable?"

"No. I am only tired. Kiss me, dear."

Moila flung her arms round her sister's neck and pressed her lips to hers in a silent but passionate assurance of sympathy, for she knew that Dorina had some trouble on her mind that she could not tell her then. Her head was grasped in that position, and she saw that Dorina's eyes looked wildly into hers; then another kiss was given in return for her own, and her sister asked to be taken into the house.

Once there, Dorina ought to have been happy, if kindness and affection could have contributed to that enviable state; but she bore the caresses of her parents without returning them, and escaped as quickly as possible upstairs with Moila. They entered their little chamber, then Dorina's head reeled, the place grew dark about her, and she fell on the bed in a swoon.

Moila, though she had never seen any one faint except Mrs. Desmond, did not lose her presence of mind; and although she was much inclined to summon her mother, refrained from doing so, knowing that Dorina wished to escape all observation from the first. She did what she could with cold water and smelling-salts, for *sal volatile*

was a luxury confined to the Castle and Clonshavale. However, with the assistance of those homely restoratives Dorina was soon revived.

“I suppose it is because I have not broken my fast yet, Moila,” she explained; “I felt it coming on; so get me something to eat, dear, for I am positively starving.”

When Moila went on her errand, Dorina hid her face in her hands, and wept bitterly. “Dear old Rosmary,” she murmured; “dear old place, where she and I were born, where a thousand tender memories live,—must they all pass away?” She ceased, and thought for a moment, then added passionately,—“Is Dorina M'Dermott a fool, and is Erroll Desmond indeed the master of her fate?”

CHAPTER XVII.

DORINA'S OATH.

MOILA returned, bearing the tray, covered with a snowy napkin and all the dainties she could devise to tempt Dorina to a good repast; but it was useless: every morsel she tried to swallow almost choked her; and, except a cup of tea, she partook of nothing. Refreshed, however, by it, she became more cheerful, talked freely about the people at Clonshavale, and everything else that came uppermost in her mind, but made no mention of either Erroll Desmond or the glen.

"It is no use your trying to blindfold me, dear," said Moila, after she had watched her sister for some time; "something has made you more unhappy than when you were here last, and you should tell it to me—indeed you should."

"Do you so readily impart your own

secrets?" returned Dorina, looking into Moila's face with an arch smile. "I have been very miserable about you, and, for the matter of that, am so still; however, it is not that which vexes me now, so I will not try to deceive you. Something occurred to me this morning which has made me forget even my uneasiness about you; but you must not ask me what it is, as I see you are preparing to do; you must trust me. Can you trust me, Moila?"

"I can—I can, indeed; through all and everything, I trust you, Dorina."

"That is comfortable, darling. Well, thus trusting, you will never believe anything ill of me, and that is a great mercy. But now about yourself. Why do you not ask what made me uneasy about you?"

"Well, then, what was it?"

"You were so cold to me, Moila—so reserved—and endeavoured so evidently to avoid me—"

"Why, that is exactly what I thought of you."

"Of me, my dear?"

"Yes, of you; not because you were always with Miss Sarsfield, for if I got the

chance I should be the same ; but you never seemed to think of me at all ; yet you did think of me, Dorina, and, oh ! it makes me so happy to feel that you love me still." And Moila danced about in delight ; then hugged her sister as if she could smother her. However, Dorina bore the hugging very patiently, and seemed to like it.

But the transport once over, Moila sat down and looked at her sister calmly.

"Did you meet Mr. Lynmore on your way from Clonshavale ?" she asked.

"No ; but, *à propos*, it was of him I wanted to speak. Why, Moila, how you start. But no wonder, I am such an abrupt rude thing. However, you know of old that I always dive at once into the pith of what I mean to say. There, put your head down on my shoulder, and give me your hand ; now I am blind. Why was it you did not tell me this from the first ?"

But Moila was silent, and Dorina continued,—

"I was thinking so much about you at Clonshavale, that I have managed to read this enigma at last. You kept silent on that subject because you thought your sister loved

him also. Easy, dear, put back your head, and remain quiet. I understand it all; and if anything in the world could make you dearer to me, it would be that tender feeling. I always said you were an angel; I told Toby so long ago. But now listen, Moila: if Lynmore laid his hand and fortune this moment at my feet, I would reject both. Quiet, I am not half done yet; so keep down your head, and do not tremble as if I were going to kill you. Yes, I would reject both, because he is neither rich nor powerful enough for me. You know I was always ambitious, and now I confess that I soar even higher than you gave me credit for. I shall yet be mistress of Castlethomond, for I will yet be Erroll Desmond's wife."

"Dorina, Dorina, are you mad?" burst at length from Moila's lips as she started from her sister's arms.

"No, dear, quite sane, I assure you. I swear I shall never marry any man but Erroll Desmond. It is my oath—solemnly and sacredly I swear it, before Heaven and you. It is my oath, and I will keep it."

Moila gazed on her sister in absolute awe, for there was something desperate, not only

in her words, but in her manner and appearance. She had risen from her bed, and had pushed back her hair, which fell in dishevelled beauty over her shoulders; her features were rigid in very intensity of feeling; her blue eyes looked black with excitement; and her small hands were clenched as though with an iron determination and some settled purpose.

She took one step forward, then grasped the rail of the bed like a drunken woman.

"Ah!" she said, all energy dying out of her; "ah! I am but a poor weak creature after all. Oh! that I could be strong—that I had more nerve for the task that is before me."

Her agitation had become too serious now for Moila to trifle with, so she flew to the fireplace and pulled the bell, only returning in time to catch the exhausted girl in her arms as she was falling to the ground.

"She is so ill, mother," explained Moila as Mrs. M'Dermott entered. "She came from Clonshavale without breakfast, and I am sure it is that which has upset her so."

"Without breakfast? Enough to ruin the constitution of a bishop," said the mother,

bending tenderly over her. "Why, child; it was ten o'clock when she came here. Dorina, *ma gra bawn*,* lie still, for rest and food are all you want. Moila, run and prepare some strong beef-tea, and, in the mean time, bring a bottle of that old port wine you will find in the parlour cupboard."

Moila obeyed; and Dorina, feeling all the better for the recommended beverage, put her arms round her mother, and drew her towards her.

"Don't you love Rosmary?" she asked. "I do; and so does father. Don't you love the poor old farm, mother, dear?"

"That I do, my darling; and why not? Sure I came here a happy bride, almost as young as you are now; and did not you and Moila come to bless us here, and be the staff of the old days that are in store for your father and myself, please God? Love Rosmary! Is it not my home? and for that reason is there a spot on earth so beautiful?"

Dorina kissed her mother, and lay back on the pillows, but said no more. Then Moila came and sat beside her, endeavouring to

* My white or fair darling.

screen her anxiety by chatting gaily to them both.

But Mrs. M'Dermott, simple woman that she was, only attributed Dorina's weakness to the want of food, and assured her husband that "nothing was amiss with the colleen but real downright starvation. Sure she was brought up so tenderly, and her poor head was crammed so full of the branches, that it is no wonder she is just what she is—a lady, and fit for no hardships whatever. The same way with Moila; sure you see her going about like a shadow, frightening us both; and even when we called in Dr. Ernest not a bit of information did he give us. I always said that no good would come of those extravagant schools; and now you prove it; but those who sow must reap, and Heaven be merciful in the whirlwind."

Mrs. M'Dermott seemed to be right in her judgment, at least so far as Dorina's indisposition was concerned, for the next day she came down to dinner looking almost as fresh and beautiful as ever.

The meal passed over cheerfully enough, but the keen-sighted farmer detected that all was not yet right with his daughters. How-

ever, not wishing to disturb the peace of his good wife, he kept his thoughts to himself, and set to mixing his tumbler of punch with apparently as much zest as usual—first the sugar, then the spirits, a glass full to the brim, then the squeeze of a lemon; but, as the boiling water was being poured on those familiar ingredients, there was a peculiar click. Smash went the tumbler right in two, and Mrs. M'Dermott raised her hands in horror.

"It is the *dhunnus*," she said, moving her head mysteriously.

"Yes, it is always ill luck with an old cracked glass, when a man loses his liquor by it," replied the farmer, looking ruefully at the punch that flowed about the table in little lakes and peninsulas, until it met in a river, and trickled down on Dorina's dress.

But despite the little incident, the farmer made himself comfortable with a second tumbler, and they gathered round the fire, looking back at the rain which now began to fall, feeling the contrast the outside scene presented with the warmth within their little parlour.

A figure passed the window—a figure dressed in a fashion peculiarly its own, and

wearing a pair of double-soled clogs. This they knew to be Toby, who had gone to the post-office for letters early in the morning, and who had been loitering, in his usual good-for-nothing style, about the village until now.

After wiping his feet very tenderly on the door-mat, Toby stood there, hat in hand, with a letter held out towards Dorina.

"For you, miss," he said. But his eyes were fixed on Moila with peculiar meaning.

Dorina read the epistle aloud; it was an invitation for the M'Dermott family to a christening party, which was to be held a week hence, for people in the country like long invitations—it is something to look forward to. There was a little debate as to whether it should be accepted. The mother said the weather was too cold; but that objection was overruled by the farmer protesting that he should drive them himself in the covered car, and that the O'Donnells were "such nice people, he would not for the world offend them." Accordingly, it was arranged to the satisfaction of all that they should go.

During the little by-play between the members of the family, Toby remained on the door-mat twirling his hat about and look-

ing very sheepish, trying all the time to attract Moila's notice.

"Anything more?" said Dorina, seeing him linger.

There was another twist of the hat and a shuffle of the clumsy feet, but he did not answer.

"Have you another letter?" asked Moila, looking towards him at last.

He ducked his head forward, winked knowingly, and made signs with his hands that would have puzzled even a freemason. However, Moila understood them, and followed him out to the hall; but even there he refused to be more explicit, and would not speak until they were both together in what they called the state drawing-room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VOICE FROM THE VILLAGE.

THE state but little used drawing-room was a large, sombre-looking apartment, with damp and mould hiding cunningly behind the family pictures, which were the pride and glory of the M'Dermotts; but Toby cared nothing for that line of ancestors, even though it should run back to the antediluvian race. He turned to Moila after carefully shutting the door, and began what he had to tell her without the slightest hesitation in either speech or manner. He was always at his ease with her; and why not, for had she not pitied the half-starved orphan from the moment he was taken for shelter under her father's roof? and did she not teach him that the same God cared for rich and poor alike, thus engrafting something good into his rugged nature, and

making a true and faithful creature out of a wild barbarian?

This much she had done, but she could do no more, for her efforts to teach him the simplest elements of education were fruitless; and Toby was still an ignorant being, obeying the instincts she had roused within him, rather than using the little intellect he had been endowed with. She was as an angel in his sight, so pure and lovely, that but for the dim sense of idolatry which floated through his mind he could have fallen down and worshipped her. Even in the midst of their most kindly intercourse that feeling possessed him: he felt that she was as far above him as the blue sky was from the earth he should have helped to till.

"I want to tell you what I heard in the village, Miss Moila," began Toby. "And I didn't think it wor right that she it concerns most should hear it too; so jist sit down a bit, and you can judge if I was right."

Moila did as directed, and stared at the foundling in curiosity.

"You see, miss," he continued, "it's all account of our village bein' such a gossipin' place. Them idle people have nothin' better

to do than jist talk about their neighbours ; but I think some o' them got a lesson to-day that 'll make 'em keep a civil tongue in their heads for the future."

"But what is the gossip about?"

"You see, miss, when an humble boy like me hears anything wrong with respects to the family he honours most, he thinks he has just right and title to avenge it ; and when Pat M'Carthy mentioned something about Miss Dorina that I don't mean to repeat to you, something about that scoundrel Erroll Desmond, I just up wid my fist—"

"You did not strike the man or get into any scrape on our account, I hope?" interrupted Moila, starting to her feet in alarm.

"Faith and bedad I did. I sthruck him, and left him like a corpse behind me at the village inn."

"Oh, Toby, to drag my sister's name before the people in such a place as that ; and—and, my goodness, if the man should die you would be hanged for his murder."

"I wouldn't like to soil her name at all ; but the de'il a bit I'd care about the rope or the swing."

"Her name can face the light. But, Toby, you poor, loving, foolish creature, what will father say if this comes to his ears? Where is the man you have fought with, and what is the mischief you have really done him?"

"Well, I only jist left his head split open, and he'd own the nine lives o' a cat if he keeps one in his carcase; any ways he's no loss, always a trappin' o' the gentry's game, and bedad my little twig here trapped him at last. How dare he say—? But, no. I don't mean to tell you that, I'll only ask you to advise like with Miss Dorina, and to prevent her o' meetin' Mr. Erroll in the glen and such like places when other people are in bed."

Moila sank back in her chair and stared at Toby aghast.

"It is thrue for me, miss," he added; "and sorry I be to say your father's daughter had done the like. My old comrade, as is called Boots at the inn, he told me that what Pat M'Carthy said was thrue, for he had seen them both go into the glen yesterday morning—he about five minutes after her."

Moila was silent for a moment. Too well she remembered how Dorina had come to the farm, and the strange words she had

heard her use ; but she repelled suspicion before it had time to take any tangible form, and said,—

“Toby, you were very wrong in resenting what that man M‘Carthy chose to talk about ; and yet I like you all the better for it.” Here her white teeth gnashed together, as though she would have done the same. “And you showed a great deal of prudence in only telling me of it, for although I would not even hint about it to Miss Dorina, I can put her on her guard respecting Mr. Desmond. If she met him in the glen on her way to Clonshavale, it must have been through accident, so that no blame could be attached to her. It only proves how many evil minds there are in the world when anything bad is said of an innocent girl like her.”

“Thru for you, *aroon* ; and therefore I thrashed the man as said it.”

“I never knew until now,” she continued, thoughtfully, “that there was a single soul in our village who would harm either Miss Dorina or myself ; but I suppose poor Pat M‘Carthy took his cue from some one else.”

“How might that be, miss ? for bedad if I know of any one making a bad use of a letter

in the blessed alphabet, I'd murder him as well as I murdered Pat himself."

Moila smiled, despite her indignation at the village gossip, and when she saw Toby flourish his stick at the ancestral pictures on the walls, she laughed outright. He opened the door, saying that he should go to his dinner, "or the praties would be melted to flour in the saucepan,"—and so he went.

When Moila re-entered the parlour, she found Dorina twisting about a white tarletan dress in evident dissatisfaction.

"It is so shabby, dear," she said, in answer to her sister's questioning looks.

"But you have made a mistake, that dress is mine; I know by the reef in the centre flounce; so you need not fear, for yours is quite fresh, and as good as new."

"It was of you I thought. As for myself, I care very little. But how did you tear this pretty dress?"


"With a briar at the harvest-home."

"All Sir William Heatherington's fault, of course. Poor young man, I do hope he will not commit suicide, or go to the bad in any way on your account, for he seemed sadly smitten."

Moila laughed aloud, but it was a laugh very different to what Toby had heard in the drawing-room, for if the poor foundling had any knowledge in such matters, he might have detected an hysterical ring in it then ; but now it echoed round the little parlour in free and merry music.

Her fears were at rest, for although she could not bring herself to believe anything evil of her sister, an uneasy sense of dread had haunted her from the moment of Dorina's appearance at the farm on the previous morning. Now, when she saw her actually taking an interest in a trumpery dress, her dread vanished, and she enjoyed her perplexity about it to the utmost.

That was not like a guilty or misguided woman standing at her father's table, unfolding a tumbled tarletan costume with such interest, and studying what coloured ribbon would best refresh it, particularly when that costume was not her own. No, Dorina was still her best and dearest—the Dorina she had loved from childhood—true, good, and single-hearted. Not the Dorina who had been estranged from her so long, revelling in ambitious dreams, and breathing an arti-



ficial atmosphere that was poison to her better nature. If Dorina were not good and innocent, how could she stand like that under her father's roof, and meeting his gaze with an answering look of fearless love? No, she was her own true sister still, and Moila secretly vowed that she would never again doubt her.

They shared the same room that night, for they could not bring themselves to separate; it was so sweet to have the old ties renewed—to feel again that interchange of thought and feeling, the pure and sympathetic affection which had always bound them lovingly together; and yet what a gulf was lying wide between them,—a gulf so deep and yet so shallow that neither sought to pass it.

A few simple words of explanation, a hint, a sign, and the sisters would have known each other thoroughly; but as it was, each kept her own secret, and that secret held them further apart than ever.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

A WHOLE week's rain left everything about the farm in a damp and sloppy condition. Although the weather had cleared up since morning, and the autumnal sun was doing his best to rectify the evil, still it was a damp and unpleasant morning; but all the power of the elements could not damp Moila's spirits on that occasion, for if the truth must be told, she was glad to get rid of Lynmore Desmond. Seldom did she look more happy, and the change in her gladdened the mother's heart, and made the old farmer chuckle over his breakfast, and do more havoc among the good things on the table than he had done for a long while before. Dorina seemed the only one present who could not enter into the general satisfaction. She sat stirring her tea in

moody silence. However, all the others seemed to understand her, for they knew it was the day her friends were to start for abroad.

There were several little arrangements discussed about the christening party over that cosy meal; consultations, too, as to the colour of Moila's ribbons and flowers, till it was decided that Dorina should go to the village and purchase them. But she had another and more important duty to perform first; for with all her repugnance to say farewell, she could not let Mrs. Desmond leave without one parting word. She had deferred it till the last hour, and left the farm determined to make up for loss of time by walking quickly across the fields.

There was never any difficulty in seeing Mrs. Desmond, and the girl was welcomed now with even more warmth than usual.

"I knew you would be here this morning, Dorina," said the invalid, fondling the girl's plump little hand, and enjoying its softness. "I knew you would never let me go away without a farewell, and—but are we alone?"

"No, madame; Annette is doing something with a packing-case at the window."

Mrs. Desmond dismissed her maid, then turned and looked sharply at Dorina, who, although she did not shrink before that gaze, felt all its unpleasantness, for the eyes that looked into hers were larger and darker than she had ever seen them, and the wasted face looked more white and haggard from the contrast it bore to the folds of black crape that surrounded it.

"I know I can trust you with a little mission, which, in the bustle of packing up, and in all this fuss of our departure, I was afraid to trust to a servant. It is only the posting of a letter, but it is one I am particular about. Hand me my desk, dear,—thanks, here it is: you will do this without fail?"

"Certainly and immediately, without fail."

The open desk was on the table, and the open letter was lying straight before Dorina's eyes, when Annette returned with a jewelled case, and asked some questions as to its disposal. While the little discussion was going on between the mistress and maid, Dorina's eyes, not herself, of course, scanned a few words out of the letter so temptingly laid before her, and saw it was a passionate

entreaty to a Miss Landford to come to the Castle as soon as she, Mrs. Desmond, returned from abroad.

This was of no interest to Dorina, but when Miss Landford's name became as familiar to her as a household word, she remembered it too well.

She had not read more than a couple of sentences, when Annette disappeared with the jewel-case, and Mrs. Desmond sealed up the letter. It was taken care of, and soon after Dorina bade farewell to Mrs. Desmond.

She could post the letter when she went to the village for Moila's ribbons; and after looking in at the farm, which she did instinctively, Dorina set off on her girlish mission.

A little distance from the gate she saw a young girl coming towards Rosmary from the opposite road; it was one who had been a playmate of Moila and herself, and who was still an intimate acquaintance. Not wishing to delay, Dorina merely waved her hand in token of recognition to Lizzy O'Connor, and hurried away on her errand. She saw her sister run down the lawn to welcome the visitor, and the girl went into the house with her, but she thought no more about it.

Dorina had several little calls to make before she reached the village, so many people to run in and take a peep at, that she had to pass by her prime favourite, Kathleen Rochfort, for fear of being detained longer by her.

But Kathleen saw, and called out after her that she should "come in" on her way back, and Dorina answered in the same fashion that she would surely do so; then flew off, and posted the letter to Miss Landford, which, however, that lady never received, owing to her removal from its address, and which was returned to Castlethomond through the Dead Letter Office some days afterwards. But this, of course, had nothing to do with Dorina, who fulfilled her promise to Mrs. Desmond with faithful punctuality.

She next selected what she wanted at the haberdasher's, and felt much relief of mind at having the sundry trifles in her possession. She expected to see Kathleen on the look out for her, but no Kathleen was to be seen, and she hesitated as to whether she should call at her house or go home, the days were getting so short. But then she had promised, and Dorina's promises were sacred.

She was received by the old servant with the accustomed humble friendliness, but, what was not usual in that house, she was shown into the back instead of into the front and best parlour.

The woman had shut the door, but there was a door of communication between that room and the next, and it was partly open. Dorina's first impulse was to shut that also, that she might not be made privy to what passed within ; but scarcely had she advanced to do so, when she was rooted to the spot by the mention of her sister's name in a manner that shocked and terrified her. Lizzy O'Connor, after her visit to Rosmary, had got to this house while she was purchasing her innocent finery, and it was her voice that startled Dorina.

"Moila M'Dermott is no fit associate for any respectable girl," said Miss O'Connor, in a high key ; "and neither my mother nor Edward will ever allow me to speak to her again."

"Your mother," returned Kathleen, in quite as high a tone, "has, of course, every right to control your actions, but Edward is not your husband yet, and should not dare

to interfere. The M'Dermotts are quite as good as either you or I, and they are the nicest girls in the parish; that is the reason those things are said,—people are jealous of them because they are made so much of, not only at the Castle, but by Lady Ada Grayston."

"Nothing of the kind. No virtuous girl in Moila's position would have a gentleman like Mr. Lynmore dangling after her wherever she goes; and just think of your brother being snubbed and treated the way he was, because a fine gentleman amuses himself with her. Charles is a good match for any girl in the country, and, lo! she would not have him. Upon my honour, I have no patience with either you or him."

"Moila is too lady-like to snub, as you say, any one, even less a friend than Charlie."

"Lady-like; come, now, that is too much."

"Not a bit. Compare the M'Dermott girls to any of the ladies you saw from the Castle, and in what do they lose by the comparison? They are educated and refined; they are beautiful and accomplished; they are the pride and boast, not only of your village, but of the country round. And if Moila

cannot love Charlie, it is his loss, not her fault."

"I know Mr. M'Dermott was always ambitious to make ladies of his daughters."

"And he has succeeded; he could afford to do so, and he can give each a nice little fortune."

"All the better for your brother, perhaps, my dear."

"He is independent, and does not want it. He loves Moila, and I grant that he is blindly jealous of Mr. Desmond; but he would be the last in the world to hear an evil word said of her or of her sister."

"But what can he think of Lynmore's attention? Does he imagine he means to marry her? If he does, the idea is preposterous, and you will find that his visits to the farm are for no good purpose, and so I told her."

"You did not dare to tell her that, Lizzy?"

"Indeed I did, and much more than that, too; for it is only what a friend should do."

"It is what a very hard and cruel friend would do, then. Poor Moila, what did she say?"

"Well, she just rose to her feet and stood

before me, I must acknowledge looking very like a queen; her eyes were ablaze, and her figure was drawn up, tall like, taller than it ever was before; but in an instant her whole bearing changed, for she turned white as death and fell back on her chair, with her arms stretched over the table, and her head pressed down upon them."

"Poor Moila!" again repeated Kathleen.

"God knows I pitied her; and when she spoke again, it was in such a queer voice, with all its natural music gone, that it haunts me yet, indeed it does."

"But what did she say?—what did she say?"

She only just looked up a moment, and said,—

"Do not let my sister know, for it would crush her heart out."

"Oh! Lizzy, Lizzy! how did you bear that? Were you not ashamed at casting such an insult upon her?"

"Not at all; it was only my duty." But Lizzy's manner belied her words, for tears started to her eyes, and she kept remorselessly tearing to pieces some beautiful wax flowers she had made for a forthcoming

bazaar, and which, in the satisfaction of her heart, she had brought with her for Miss Rochfort's inspection. "But it was a bitter duty, and one I shall not soon forget," she stammered, flinging the flowers from her, and giving way at last.

"How did you part from her?" persisted Kathleen, feeling no compunction in not noticing her companion's tears.

"She did not seem angry a bit," replied the weeping girl; "at least not angry with me, for when I rose to come away, she looked up again and said, 'Good-by, Lizzy, God bless you!'—and I answered, 'Good-by, Moila, for we shall never meet again.' Then I ran from the house, for I could not bear her gaze. She looked like, I could not tell what, so forlorn and desolate."

The cross door communicating between the two apartments opened now, and, like the resurrection of a second Moila, Dorina entered and came forward. She leaned on the table, but seemed incapable of the power of speech or further motion.

CHAPTER XX.

AN ADVENTURE ON THE ROAD-SIDE.

"SHE has heard it all," cried Kathleen, in consternation, and putting her arms round Dorina, she endeavoured to comfort her.

"She can scarcely blame me," returned Lizzy, her pity for Moila taking the shape of fear before the white face of her sister.

Dorina tried to speak, but something in her throat seemed to prevent her; then she took the trembling hand that was laid so sympathetically on her own, and kissed it.

"You must forget all about this, Dorina, dear," said Kathleen, blushing at that humble token of gratitude; "both Lizzy and I think too highly of you and Moila to doubt your worth."

"No," at last broke from Dorina's lips, and the power of the word stopped her friend's speech at once; then turning to

Lizzy, she added, "No, she does not think too highly of us; she believes that girls in our position cannot respect themselves, and teach others to do so likewise. Lizzy O'Connor, your false friendship is scarcely worth so much notice; but Kathleen, dear, for the loyal heart you carry in your bosom, you have my esteem and love for evermore. Heaven bless you, dear!—good-bye."

Kathleen Rochfort did not attempt to detain her, but when she saw her pass the window with such an utter woe on her young face, she quitted the room in silence, leaving Lizzy alone, and thus giving her to understand that their intimacy was at an end.

Obeying the force of habit rather than of will, Dorina walked slowly homewards, totally oblivious of where she was going: her senses were stunned, her heart was bursting; and the bitter words of Lizzy O'Connor were rankling so painfully in her brain, that she was unconscious of all things else, until her path was intercepted by a dark shadow.

A man stood in her way, looking as if he did not mean to let her pass; and accustomed though she was to the loneliness of the country

roads, she now felt afraid, for there was something ruffianish in the man's appearance, —his head was bound round with an old red handkerchief, his eyes were bloodshot, and although it was still broad daylight, Dorina trembled, for there was only a wretched woman near her, who would not protect her even if she could.

In a moment, however, rallying her fears, she attempted to go on as though she did not heed him, but he caught her arm, and stopped her.

"You don't seem to know me in my new head-dress, miss," he said; "and I don't wonder at it, for it's not becoming: I'm pummelled into a jelly under here, you see."

He raised the handkerchief, but even without the aid of that, she had recognized him, and the recognition magnified her terror, for she had never heard any but evil report of Pat M'Carthy, and his threatening aspect now boded her no good.

"If you want money," she said, "here is all I have about me; take it, and let me pass."

"I'll take the purse and its contents, just through kindness, for it ought to burn you;

but it ain't for that I want to talk to you. Do you see my head, and do you know who smashed it? It were just your foundling, Toby Downs; and by —— I'll have revenge."

"You must be labouring under some mistake; poor Toby would not harm an insect, much less a man. He never fights, neither could he beat a big fellow like you, even if he did."

"There you show your ignorance; he has twice my strength, thanks to the good feeding you give him at the farm, and he thrashed me sure enough; but our next tussle will be the other way; he'll niver again chastise an honest man for speaking the truth, I'll warrant, and that was, that you, Dorina M'Dermott, wor a disgrace to the mother that bore you,"—he paused a moment, then pointing to the woman in the distance, whose character could not be mistaken, he added, coarsely,—“that you were no better than her there.”

A low cry escaped Dorina—a cry so full of anguish, that even the ruffian who caused it felt some compassion for her: she looked for a moment as if she would have fallen dead at his feet; then she confronted him as though

she could have struck him; terror was forgotten in anger, and she poured out a volley of indignant reproach, that seemed not only to astonish, but to alarm him, for he shrank and quailed before its bitter torrent.

"Faith, and it's I that's proud o' you, for a fine-spirited Irish girl," he said, grinning broadly at her, when she stopped at last; "and I humbly ax your pardon for what I said. Sure there never was a dhrop of black blood in the M'Dermotts as yet, at all events; and it's I that am glad to hear you keep up the honour of the old stock, and to see you able to defend your good name, bad cess to them that ever said a word agin it. But remember, Miss Dorah, I intend to thrash Toby Downs for what he did to me, so let him look out."

She waited to hear no more, and was hurrying away, when he ran after her, holding out the purse.

"Here," he said, "take it back, miss, for now that I know it's honest money, it won't harm you."

She neither understood him nor took the purse, but resumed her walk faster than before, until she came within sight of Ros-

mary; then she slackened her pace; to recover self-possession before she could bring herself to enter her mother's presence. If one dread more than another possessed her now, it was dread of the consequence, should these evil reports reach her parents; she believed it would break her father's heart, and send her mother to the grave. She knew they were but humble people, after all the notice either from the Castle or from Lady Ada Graytson; and though they might assert their innocence as best they could, who would believe them, for are there not many more Lizzy O'Connors in the world than there are Kathleen Rochforts?—and even to be looked upon with suspicion was more than their sensitive pride could bear.

Dorina first encountered her mother when she entered the little parlour, and asked for Moila, in as calm a manner as it was possible to assume.

"She's just lying down, dear, with a bad headache," replied Mrs. M'Dermott, "and will be all the fresher for the christening when she gets up."

"I am awfully tired, mother," complained Dorina, "and do not feel inclined for the

party at all. I would much rather have a chat with you and father here by the fire-side."

"Well, that is the only sensible speech you have made since your poor head was overladen with the branches, and the only good fruit they ever bore. I'm sure it's much better for girls to stay at home, than to be gossiping at other people's houses—aye, or castles either. I kept your dinner nice and hot, *gra gal machree*, because father would not wait for you. So just run and take off your things while I have it brought in here."

Mrs. M'Dermott was bustling away on "household cares intent," but when she reached the door, she turned back, and, pushing the hair from Dorina's forehead, pressed a kiss upon it with a thoughtful fondness.

The next moment she was gone, and Dorina asked herself what that action meant: there was something peculiar in the way her mother kissed her, and in the lingering look she bent upon her as she left the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

DID YOU KISS ME THEN ?

DREADING that her mother had heard any of the evil talk afloat, Dorina crept up to Moila's chamber almost like a guilty thing; her spirit was bowed, and a weight lay on her heart that she could not shake off, until she found herself standing beside the pale figure on the bed,—then, both heart and brain were strong once more.

Moila sat up when she saw her sister, and muttered some words of welcome, incoherently indeed, but what she thought would draw attention from herself, as she never meant to reveal what took place in her absence between Lizzy O'Connor and herself.

Dorina shuddered at the miserable face which raised itself from the pillows, and turned such wild eyes towards her. Could

this be the happy girl whom she had left in the morning,—this forlorn, desolate creature, looking so like a drooping lily in her pale sorrow, and with all the light of hope faded out from her countenance?

It was useless to attempt concealment in this matter, at least, though each would gladly have spared the other; however, the elder girl determined to carry it off with a high hand.

“I know what is troubling you, Moila, dear,” she said, taking a seat beside the bed, and beating a little tattoo on the fingers lying so quietly there. “It is no use fretting about such things as Lizzy O’Connor. So come, dear, rouse yourself, and inspect what I have brought from the village. Besides, it is nearly time for dressing, for you know father does not like to be kept waiting a moment.”

“Ah! Dorah, how could I ever go to any place again, or ever meet the face of a friend, after the vile things that girl said to me?” replied Moila, tearfully.

“Stuff and nonsense! a pure conscience can face the world, though that world were armed with sharper weapons than an envious

woman's tongue. See, is not this fine?" and Dorina displayed the flowers she purchased at the village. "As white as the dove whose head it is to adorn. A real French spray, my dear, and no miserable British trash. By the way, artificial flowers are the only trashy things a Briton manufactures."

"Oh, Dorah, Dorah, I could not go—I could not, indeed," persisted Moila, helplessly, and shuddering at the sight of the newly-purchased finery.

"My love, you must; for if you remain away, even our sweet friend Lizzy will pity you."

"Pity me! what do you mean?"

"Even the cruel can sometimes feel compassion for the guilty, and she will say you would not go because you were afraid; then she will pity you. Besides, what excuse can you make to mother for staying away?"

"I never thought of that. Yes, yes, I will go," cried Moila, starting to her feet, and twisting up her hair in haste. "Mother must have no suspicion of what they say about her children,—it would kill her. Aye, and kill our father too. Where is the ribbon?"

Give me the flowers. I am afraid we shall be late. Hurry, Dorah, hurry."

There was a feverish light burning in Moila's eyes, now, that alarmed her sister more than her former pallor had done.

"You vex me sorely, child," she said, in assumed anger. "You are taking the surest method to betray yourself to every one. Just look at your shaking hands and your absurd nervousness. Surely a baby would have more self-control and much more common-sense than this!"

"Forgive me, dearest; there, I shall sit down and let you dress my hair while I am becoming calm and good."

The beautiful tresses were unbound, and soon arranged. Yet, even while thus employed, Dorina watched every expression of Moila's face in the glass, and saw that the struggle to be "good" was almost more than could be accomplished. She longed to catch her to her breast and caress her, but refrained, and did the wiser thing: she pushed her off the chair, and bade her act as barber next. Nothing could be more natural than the employment of the girl when Mrs. M'Dermott came to marshal off Dorina to

some refreshment; and even Moila's flushed face escaped her notice.

"But you never told me how you came to hear about Lizzy O'Connor," whispered Moila, at her sister's elbow.

"Is the ribbon on your dress? Come, now, I am finished," was the short answer she received.

"Finished, child? you never began yet," said Mrs. M'Dermott. "Take your time, for the ribbon is tacked on all right; so just sit down and eat your dinner."

"I lunched in the village, and it has spoiled my appetite. Come, Moila, father will be vexed if we keep him waiting."

After an incredibly short space of time for such a toilet, the sisters stood before the admiring parents in all the glory of white tarletan, furbelows, and flounces.

"You never looked better to my thinking, though I should not say it of my own," remarked the bluff old farmer, his eyes fairly dancing with delight at the beauty of his girls.

As usual, they were dressed alike, even to the colour of the dainty little gloves; but thus standing together, there was no great

resemblance between them, although apart even a stranger could not fail to remark it. Each had the same coloured hair and eyes, the same cast of features and expression, still they were very different. Dorina was what was generally called a fine girl—beautiful, brilliant, and clever. Moila was more refined and lovely, possessing a nameless charm of softness that her sister only had at times. Even the farmer seemed to understand this difference between them, for he caressed Moila, but stood aloof in admiration of Dorina.

There were many jests and flattering speeches exchanged between the little group before the car drove to the door. Then Toby came, as usual, shuffling about his feet on the mat, and twisting round his hat more awkwardly than ever.

But something he held in his hand besides the hat attracted Moila's attention—a little white fluttering thing, which she secretly took and tore open: it was a letter.

The farmer was putting on his top-coat with his face towards the fire, and Mrs. M'Dermott was wrapping up Dorina in all sorts of muffings, when there was a violent

rattle of the door-handle, and Moila, reeling towards them, fell at their feet.

Dorina sprang forward, and, seeing the letter, concealed it in the folds of her dress. "She was ill all day," she explained, "and it was I who forced her to get ready for this horrid party. Fetch some water and the smelling-salts. See, she is coming to already. Just take her in your arms, father, and lay her on the sofa. There, now let her rest quietly while I write an apology to the O'Donnells, for of course we cannot go now. Toby can take it, as he has the horse and all ready."

Dorina gave her directions decisively, and each one mechanically obeyed her. She watched Toby turning away with the note, and after giving him sufficient time to reach the hall-door, followed him out.

"Give me back that note, Toby," she whispered, "and just take the horse round by the front and down the road a bit, then through the back way to the stable.

"All right, miss," replied the sagacious Downs, who knew well that those instructions were to blindfold the farmer, and that the note he had given Moila required no answer.

When her sister was sufficiently recovered, Dorina insisted on her going to her own room and remaining quiet; but even there it was long before there was an opportunity for Moila to ask about the unlucky letter.

"It is quite safe, and shall be kept as a memento of friendship," replied Dorina, sarcastically. "Here it is: short, sweet, and—oh, how kind!—‘Mr. and Mrs. O'Donnell regret they are obliged to decline the pleasure of the Misses M'Dermott's society this evening.’ To the purpose, is it not; and beautifully legible on this large sheet of satin-like paper? Well, those people shall not have it all their own way, for I shall call to-morrow and demand an explanation for this insulting epistle."

"And thus let our parents hear all about it?"

"Indeed, Moila, now that matters have gone so far, I cannot fancy how they are to be kept in ignorance. It would be better for either of us to tell them, than that one of our loving friends should do so. Besides, there must be some means of finding out the traducers of our fair fame, and father is the one to punish and expose them."

"It would be madness to do that, the shame would kill our mother."

"I thought so at first, but now my mind is altered; she will blame herself, I fear, for allowing the Desmonds to come here so often, and she will talk a great deal about the branches, and all that kind of thing; but, knowing our truth, she will help our father to defend us."

Moila made no reply to this. Her sister's manner on the morning she came from Clonshavale had filled her with a vague alarm, and she could not rid herself entirely of it; ever since, she shrank from broaching the subject to her; but now she could keep silent no longer, and with a terrible throbbing of the heart she ventured to say something about it.

"I am sure my manner was not half as strange as yours is now," answered Dorina, sharply, and with a crimson face.

"It was a strange fancy of yours to come through the glen," persisted Moila, as if following the bent of her own thoughts rather than addressing her companion.

"Who told you I came through the glen? But no matter, it is the truth, and I shall not deny it."

"It was so very early, and the place so lonely."

"Still harping on the one string: it is enough for me to remember I came through the glen. Ah! I am not likely ever to forget it. What passed there you shall learn when the time comes for you to know, and it will come too soon, I fear."

Dorina's eyes flashed, the crimson deepened on her face, and her little hands were clenched vindictively, as she added, "What a terrible power belongs to wealth: how it can hurl the weak, the humble, to destruction; fire the heart with hate, crush the simple beneath its chariot-wheels, and smile in scorn at their suffering! But the simple can turn, not, indeed, like the trodden worm, but with a sting—a power of their own that can draw even position to their own level, and make the word equality a thing of substance and reality."

"Dorina, Dorina, what are you saying?"

"What I should not say, because it has frightened you; but do not heed my senseless words, or—" Dorina broke off with the monosyllable, then looking more earnestly into her sister's face, continued—"Or do you doubt me, really doubt me, Moila? for if so,

it is the bitterest trial that I have yet borne. You turn coldly from me. Ah! no wonder strangers are unkind, when our own flesh and blood can be so too."

"Mr. Desmond was with you, he is always with you, following you about and making you conspicuous. What brought him to the glen at such an hour—was it by appointment?"

There was no answer, and Moila added hurriedly,—

"I know I have no right to speak like this to you, because I lie also under the shadow of suspicion, and I have kept two secrets from you—one involves the interest of other parties, so of that I must still be silent; the other is—how am I to tell you? it is so hard to speak of such things even to you; but as you have made the same mistake as others did about Lynmore and myself, I must set you right, so far as to assure you that you are wrong as well as they."

"How so?—are you not—"

"No; not one whit in love with Lynmore, for that is what you were going to say. Were I in the humour, I might sing, 'My heart, my heart is over the sea,' for it is there with Charley Rochfort."

Dorina was silent; she had never suspected this; and it was some time before she could bring her mind to comprehend it. She was still thinking about it, when Moila said, "Now tell me if it was by appointment that Erroll Desmond met you in the glen."

This question was answered by another.

"Moila, you remember running down the lawn to meet me: did I kiss you then?"

"You did; but I was startled at the pallor of your face, and your kiss was very strange."

"But still I kissed you. Would I have done so, would I have dared to press my lips to yours, if I were unworthy of it?"

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Dorina!"—and Moila's arms were round her sister's neck, and her passionate caresses spoke more than words could do. It was a rare thing for Dorina to weep, but now as her sister was pressed to her heart, tears fell over her head and glistened on the sunny hair like diamonds; and jewels of the soul they were: but Moila neither saw nor felt them, for when she withdrew herself Dorina was calm again.

CHAPTER XXII.

ANOTHER GLIMPSE OF THE STRANGER.

AFTER an almost sleepless night, Dorina made up her mind to place Mrs. O'Donnell's letter in her father's hands, and to give him as full an explanation of it as it lay in her power to give. She would wait only till after breakfast, for she had a presentiment that it should be the last meal they would partake of in peace and happiness at Rosmary.

Nothing had ever interrupted the harmony of her family circle; but a cloud was gathering now, and she wished to keep off the shadows as long as it was safe to do so. But the meal was over, and Dorina had not the courage to chase the smile from her mother's lips, or to bring a frown upon her father's brow. Several times she had caught the letter in her fingers; but, unable to withdraw

it, only crushed it back again into her pocket. Then her heart beat wildly as her father stopped to stroke her hair on his way from the room : he was gone, and the terrible thing lay in her pocket, mocking her fears.

Her agitation at length becoming insupportable, she went out in the cold morning air, scarcely knowing or caring where she was going to. But Moila saw her as she was leaving the house, and wrapt a warm shawl about her. But had the poor Red Rose been clothed in muslin, she would have been impervious to cold. She was sensible only to the sting of slander, and it lashed her proud spirit into impatient fury.

Moila watched her from the window. She saw her walking quickly down the lawn, then turning to the path that led to the ruined abbey ; but she had not gone far when she was overtaken by Erroll Desmond. Moila saw that Dorina did not accept his outstretched hand, and that she bowed coldly on their meeting. For a while they conversed together, then Erroll, taking a newspaper from his top-coat pocket, opened it, and appeared to point out a paragraph which she read with avidity ; then the paper was

returned. He said something, and endeavoured to take her hand, but it was snatched away. Her figure was drawn proudly up, and an empress could not have walked past him with a more queenly air. This dumb scene was all, of course, a mystery to Moila, and that vague distrust of her sister began to creep back on her heart again. However, her bitter thoughts were put to flight, and everything else was forgotten in amazement, when she saw Dorina run back to Erroll with outstretched hands, which, when she came up to him, were raised with a pleading gesture, and she spoke with such an earnestness, that even at that distance it could be distinctly seen.

Mr. Desmond's tall form towered over the supplicating girl in seeming coldness; but it was only for a moment. The next she would have been clasped in his arms had she not adroitly evaded him, and her old proud reserve had evidently returned; for, standing aloof, she seemed to address him indignantly. then left him as before.

Moila could not withdraw her gaze—it was rivetted on Dorina; it followed her until she came near the house, then she listened for

her entrance, and tracked her footsteps up the stairs, with an intensity of feeling painful to bear. She knew that it was useless to try to gain her sister's confidence, for whatever Dorina's secret was, it was but too evident that she meant to keep it to herself.

Thinking thus alone in the little parlour, and with her face buried in her hands, Moila did not see a figure come up to the window and peer into the room as if seeking some one, until there was a tap, and she raised her head.

A tall man, enveloped in a cloak, and with a broad-leafed hat pulled over his brow, was beckoning to her: she knew him well, and her former interview with him partially reassured her now. He signed to her to open the window; she obeyed, and, standing in the bitter cold, he spoke to her with his head uncovered. It was evident then that the hat was not meant for anything bordering on disguise; for if so, as the excess of politeness was unnecessary, he had an excuse for not removing it.

"I only want to speak a few words, Miss M'Dermott," he said; "and if you will allow me to say them here, it will do very well."

"But the cold, sir," returned Moila, shivering at the little blast that swept across the room.

"I am accustomed to all weathers, and to hardships of every kind. I see a shawl or a rug on the chair there, just put it about you. Yes; that will do nicely. A rug it is, and very comfortable, I am sure."

"But, surely, you will replace your hat—"

"Because I am bald? Simple child, after the climate of Siberia this is a comparative summer. But to business. You are, Moila, I believe?"

"Yes, my sister's name is Dorina."

"You are so like, and yet so different. From what I know of both, I think now that Dorina would be the better business woman of the two. Could I see her?"

"If the business be important, and cannot be deferred, you shall, but otherwise I would rather not disturb her."

"Quite unnecessary, I assure you; I merely want to ask a question or two. Can you tell me if the lease of Rosmary Farm is a valid document?"

"I suppose so, sir. At all events, I never heard to the contrary."

"Never heard a word at all about it, I suppose? Think well before you answer."

"Yes, now I remember, some of the neighbours used to speak about it—one old friend in particular."

Moila paused, and blushed.

"Who, my child? One old friend? Who was that?"

"Mr. O'Donnell. But he is no longer a friend, sir; and, therefore, I hesitated to mention his name."

"What has he done to forfeit the honour of being a friend to you? But I see that this is a disagreeable subject, therefore I shall not pursue it. As to the lease, what did your neighbour say about it?"

"That there was some flaw in it, and recommended father to put it into the hands of an attorney to have it made all right."

"Which he did, of course?"

"No; he always said that Mr. Walter's word was as good as a lease, and so it ended."

"So it did not end, my simple Moila. Walter is dead. His lease of life was curtailed by an unforeseen enemy. Death stepped in and took possession when least expected, and Erroll reigns supreme. Now

here am I, a stranger. Suppose I bid a higher rent for Rosmary than Mr. M'Dermott is giving, who could prevent Mr. Desmond letting it to me, and turning your father out?"

Moila was silent and perplexed for a moment, then she said,—

"The court of equity would prevent it; and if it did not, you would be shot."

"Shot! I am bullet-proof; and there is no court of equity, except in name, all over the globe. But I do not want to take the farm, so you need not be uneasy. Could you tell me in what the flaw consists?"

"You must excuse me, sir; most likely I have been wrong in speaking of those things to you at all. Please say good-bye, and leave me."

"Is this Irish hospitality?"

"No, sir, mother is here to receive you."

At this moment Mrs. M'Dermott entered the room, for she had heard the voices, and the stranger, unembarrassed, accepted her invitation to enter. Not wishing, however, to give her the trouble of opening the door, he vaulted across the window-sill in a light and easy fashion.

"Pardon this unceremonious introduction,"

he said, throwing back his cloak and shutting the window; "but your daughter and I have met before, and, taking an interest in her, I came here as a friend."

"You are welcome to Rosmary, sir," replied the farmer's wife, with simple grace, and placing a chair for his acceptance.

"I was just catechising your daughter on a matter of business, which, no doubt, you will think impertinent on my part, madam; but interest in her welfare can, I hope, plead my excuse. I was speaking about the lease of this place, as I understand there has been some mistake in the drawing up of it; but, before you speak, allow me to assure you that I do not want the farm, nor do I know any one who does. Now you see, madam, you are perfectly safe in saying what you like to me."

But Mrs. M'Dermott said nothing. She sat open-mouthed, gaping at the man before her as though she had not heard a word he uttered.

"I hope you do not consider me either inquisitive or impertinent, do you, madam?" resumed the stranger, meeting her gaze with composure.

"Where have I seen you before, sir?" she asked, heedless of his question.

"It would be hard to say. You should be the best judge of that."

He still kept his face towards her, but she shook her head despairingly, and murmured,

"I cannot remember."

"I have been here some time back, living no place in particular, for a Bohemian sort of life suits me best. You may have seen me at the harvest-home, for I partook of your good cheer then. Yes, now perhaps I can assist your memory. You danced with Lord Hamilton that day. Who was the person who solicited your hand for the next dance?"

"A gentleman with a slouched hat and long cloak."

"Are not these they?" he asked, pointing to both.

"Yes, I suppose so; I suppose it must have been at the harvest-home I saw you before. And now, sir, you will have some refreshment before you speak about the business matter."

Treating as nought all refusal of her hospitality, Mrs. M'Dermott had cake and wine placed upon the table, and the good lady was

made comfortable by seeing her guest partake of both with much relish.

"Good old sherry that, Mrs. M'Dermott," he said, holding the contents of his glass between him and the light, and eyeing it with the glance of a connoisseur.

"It is older than my Dorina, and I am glad you like it, sir."

"How old may that be, madam?"

"Dorina, or the wine?"

"Whichever may please you best."

"My girl is nineteen; the wine is twenty, if a day."

"Splendid." And the glass was replenished.
"But now to business. The lease of Rosmary Farm is depending on two lives, I believe, madam."

"Yes; on two lives."

"And one is gone—dropped off, dead."

"Yes; poor Mr. Walter."

"And the other, madam?"

"Oh! no one knows anything about the other—where he is, I mean."

"But suppose he were dead also, what is to prevent the present Mr. Desmond from disposing of the farm as it best suited him?"

"He would never do that. The Desmonds are an honourable race, and Mr. Walter—"

"Mr. Walter has nothing to do with it now."

"Ah! that is too true; and more is the pity, dear lad. But even Mr. Erroll—"

"Mr. Erroll is what is generally called a scamp—a wild one."

"How dare you say that? Who are you who comes to judge our landlords?" said Mrs. M'Dermott, forgetting herself in her clannish pride.

"My name is Seaward; but some call me a Fenian, Head-centre Incognito, and such like."

"My Dorah called you that; but it was only out of a girlish freak. She told me about the man who wore a slouched hat and a long cloak that she saw at the harvest-home. She had no harm in the nickname."

"Are hats and cloaks so rare in this country as to cause remark?"

"The cloaks are, sir."

"Well, I am not offended. I am here only as a friend, wishing to put you on your guard, and to advise you to have the lease made right, if it be not already too late.

Ah ! Mrs. M'Dermott, no matter how reckless a man's own life may be, no matter how callous the heart he carries in his bosom, he can sometimes feel compassion for the young and innocent. I do so for your daughter here and for her sister. Were I in your husband's place, I would not let another day pass without a more valid document being drawn up, to keep the roof over my head, and all my comfortable chattels in my own possession."

"But, sir, my husband could not speak of that now, when the family is in such sore distress at the loss of Mr. Walter. No, not even to save more than his worldly goods, would he break upon the sanctity of their grief with such a matter !"

"A piece of folly he yet may rue. How long have you been living here ?"

"Is it me ? Of course, since I was married. But the place belonged to the M'Dermotts for I don't know how many generations."

"It may continue so to do if you follow my advice ; if not— But I suppose every man knows his own business best, and so does your husband. It is not a very complicated affair—clear as noonday—although the lease

has lasted so far without giving you uneasiness. Did the term of the former lease expire before you were married? This is an important question, madam. Recollect it is of the former lease I speak now."

"I understand perfectly, Mr. Seaward; it was the one that ran for generations through the family. It expired about a year or two after I was married; that was on the 25th of March, Lady-day—"

"You need not trouble about dates, for it is sufficient to know that the lease ran out. Mr. M'Dermott was an easy man, and Mr. Walter was a good one. The arrangement was made, of course, by his father when young Mr. Desmond—Mr. Walter, I mean—was a child, and it was all right as long as he lived. It is very different now; and I would recommend you again to see to it. Trust no man, that is the law I go by; trust no man,—and you will yet learn that it is a good one. Now I will say adieu. Farewell, my fair young friend. Moila—sweet name—*au revoir!* we shall meet again."

As the stranger left the room, Mrs. M'Dermott took a step forward as if she would have followed him.

"I am sure I know who he is," she said, turning to her daughter. "Shall I call him back? A moment longer in his presence and I should have remembered all about him. Seaward, Seaward, the name is strange to me though."

"You never saw him, mother, dear, except at the harvest-home, so let him go. But what is all this about the lease? Will you speak of it to father?"

"Speak of it to father? of course, my dear. What did I ever keep from father? Are we not everything to him, and should he not be everything to us?"

Moila felt the unpremeditated reproof, but made no reply.

CHAPTER XXIII.

STRANGE NEWS.

“AND should he not be everything to us?” repeated the loyal wife in a dreamy tone, as if giving expression to the thought that dwelt uppermost in her mind.

She had taken her usual seat, a low, cosy-looking chair, which always stood in one place by the fireside; it had been there ever since Moila could remember, and all the family felt a tender reverence for it. Leaning back on the soft cushions, Mrs. M'Dermott repeated those few words for the third time, then Moila came forward, and, kneeling down, put her arms over her mother's lap, as she had done, in that same attitude and in that same place, from the hour she had learned to lisp her first prayer.

"When you marry, child, let that be your maxim, as it has been mine," said Mrs. M'Dermott, fondly stroking the sunny hair that was scattered over her knees. "I mean, never keep a secret from your husband, for there can be no one as near or as dear to you as him; therefore, who could better guide and counsel you?"

"On the same principle, mother dear, children should not keep secrets from their parents," returned Moila, shaking like a tender aspen.

Mrs. M'Dermott raised the sweet face to hers; it was pale with agitation, or with the fear that oppressed her, and the mother's heart yearned to comfort its darling. "I know all, my child." She said no more, for on the moment Dorina entered, who, standing at the door, read something of the truth in their position.

"It is revealed at last," she thought. "Moila has had more courage than me; mother knows the calumny afloat about us, and this is the result."

Dorina took her place silently beside them; her face was quite as pale as Moila's, and a nervous tremor played about her mouth,

which all her self-control was powerless to hide.

"Yes, my children, I know all," continued Mrs. M'Dermott, now caressing Dorina's head as she had caressed Moila's. "I knew it from the first, for is not a mother the first to hear such things?—and when Mrs. O'Donnell's letter came last night, I knew what it was about."

"And father?" murmured Dorina.

"I told him; but until that letter came he would not believe that such reports existed at all. Now he is furious, and is gone to the village about it. As he returns he will call at the O'Donnells' and demand an explanation. I think he said something about an attorney, but I never could remember anything of law business."

"I suppose you never had to tax your memory very much?" said Dorina.

"No, indeed; the only dealings I had in that line was with the man who drew up the lease of Rosmary. I was a witness to it."

Dorina started from her seat, startling her mother and sister with her looks. Her pallor was succeeded by a crimson flush, her eyes almost seemed to emit fire, and her chest

heaved as though a sense of suffocation oppressed her.

"What is wrong now?" cried Mrs. M'Dermott. "She is going into a fit: open the window, and fetch the smelling-salts."

But any trouble of this kind was needless, for Dorina battled bravely for self-control, and gained it. Then her mother rose, and placed her in her own chair. Something in that action reminded her of years gone by; for when Moila or herself was ailing, it was always a privilege to sit in mother's chair: they felt better in those soft cushions, and were always "good" when thus exalted. It was a strange memory to flash upon her now. She saw herself wrapt in muffings, a very small invalid. Broken toys were scattered round her, a chubby little sister was bringing her fresh flowers, and her mother, bustling about the little parlour, was casting many an anxious glance towards her. Then the picture vanished, and she laid her head back on the pillows, wondering why she did not die then, and almost wishing that she could do so now.

"Are you better, darling?" murmured Moila, bending over her.

"Quite well. Mother, what was the name of the attorney who drew up the lease?"

"What matters his name to you, my dear; I am sure you are ill."

"I am not—I am not indeed. Pray tell me."

"What a girl you are; always for having your own way."

"I know I was always wilful. Please tell the name."

"Wormington. And now what the better are you for knowing it?"

"Wormington? Is he alive now?"

"Yes, and still our lawyer; but I am glad to say your father is not a very lucrative client, for he never had much to do with law."

"Where does this lawyer live?"

"In Dublin—Gardiner's Street. But what do you want to know so much about him for?"

"Nothing."

"I thought so. Well, put your feet on the fender, and let me draw the chair nearer to the fire, your teeth are chattering with cold. Ah! *gra gal bawn*. I fear there is some heavy weight on your heart to-day; will you

not lay it on mine too, Dorina. Moila, spice some of that old port; nothing will warm your sister like that."

With a lingering look at the sad face she bent over, the "Sweet Rose of the Vale" left the room to do her mother's bidding.

"There are black things told of me, mother," said Dorina, turning abruptly from the fire.

"The snow cannot be sullied until it falls on earth."

"Moila is as pure as that snow."

"And so are you."

"Will father have this same trust in me?"

"Why not; you are his daughter and a M'Dermott?"

"But suppose I never felt this pride of race?"

"You felt the pride of virtue then."

"Mother, mother, if I were a poor degraded thing, like what some would make you now believe me, what would you do; how would you treat me?"

"As a true mother would treat the core of her heart. Child, child, you know nothing of the depth of a mother's devotion—it is unfathomable, except to God."

"And He be praised that it is so, for yours will be sorely tried."

"What do you mean, Dorina, your looks betray you?"

"Are they then guilty?"

"No, no, no; pure as an angel's: you are putting your poor mother to the test."

"Suppose I am, suppose I were here on my knees to crawl to you for mercy, suppose I were here at your feet, could you look down on me as a fallen creature and take me to your heart again?—would you do this, would you mother, darling?"

Dorina, under the influence of either her overwrought feelings, or of some extraordinary excitement, had actually attempted to do what her words portrayed: she would have crouched on the hearth and knelt before the wonder-stricken woman, had she not been prevented.

"Come now, Dorina," said Mrs. M'Dermott, quietly, yet with a firmness that her daughter never knew her to use before, "come now, explain what this is all about, for there is something that you have not yet told me, and I must know it."

"Oh! mother, mother, how can I?"

"Mrs. McDermott put her back in the chair, and waited a few minutes, to give her time to regain composure.

"Now you are calmer," she said.

"Yes, I am calmer, and now that I am so, know not how to ask your forgiveness for my outrageous folly."

"This is putting off; but I will not be put off,—you must tell me what is at the bottom of this outrageous folly."

"Do not ask me now."

"I will, and I insist on being answered. But there, do not be frightened, love; I have been cross and cruel: speak now, my own."

She had taken the girl into her arms, and soothed her like a child.

"Mother, I am faithful to you and to myself. I am faithful and true, thank Heaven for it. Ah! were I otherwise, your very kindness would have broken my heart. I will tell you all now, while I have the courage."

"Do so, my pride, my darling."

"I am not guilty, but I am wicked. Ah! Heaven pity the poor creatures who bear the world's censure as the punishment of their lost honour. Perhaps those who condemn most have never been tempted, never known

what it was to love, or to have ambition—ambition is the deeper passion of the two ; but for it, I could have shut out for ever from my presence the man who offered me his grandeur without his title—the title of his name. I dallied, encouraged, even while I despised him. And now, now he has his revenge.”

“Are you out of your senses child ? Who or what are you talking about ?”

“Erroll Desmond. Oh ! mother, he would have made me the guilty thing I could not tell you of. You do not understand me. In a word, then, he sought me as, as—not as his wife.”

“I understand you now. He dared !—the monster ! the cowardly villain !”

“Let me go on. I would not stoop to the degradation of dishonour, but I mean to attain to the honour of his name. I will be his wife !”

“That you never shall—not if he begged for you on bended knees !”

“Yes, I will be his wife. As I said before, I am ambitious. I long to be mistress of Castlethomond ; and — and — I love him, mother !”

“A moment ago you said you despised him.”

"I despise his treachery, but I love him. Ah! it is not always where we respect that we love most; but even if I did not feel that for him, my ambition would tempt me on."

She was calm and self-possessed now, and Mrs. M'Dermott, seeing that every nerve in her body was becoming so affected by the reaction which usually follows strong excitement, remained silent, lest she should irritate her again. However, in a little time Dorina withdrew herself from her arms, and looked full in her face.

"Can you trust me, mother?" she asked. "Even in this matter, can you trust me to the end? Will you abide the issue of events without asking a single question?"

"I will trust you in this and every other matter, on condition that you will never again open your lips to Mr. Desmond."

"It would be impossible for me not to speak to him again, so I will not make any such rash conditions. But, hush! here is father, and not a word to him."

"I will not keep it from him. I will tell your father. So, Dorina, be prepared."

"Oh, mother!"

"It is no use. I will tell him."

"You can do so to-morrow."

The farmer entered, looking flushed and annoyed; but on seeing Dorina, nodded gaily to her.

"What's up now?" he said. "Dorina a child again, in mother's chair? Where are the toys and lollipops? Here, this will do for one, this for another; and now for the sweets."

He put his stick in her hand, his hat on her head, and kissed her last. Then she flung her arms impulsively round his neck, and drew him down beside her.

"Mother is going to tell you something bad of me," she whispered

He returned her caress, and looked towards his wife without noticing that whisper.

"Come, old woman," he added, "make ready my repast, for like Fi-fo-fum I have an appetite; in fact, I could eat a leg of mutton this minute, and my olfactory nerves tell me that is what you have, mother."

Dorina rose and crept upon his knee but he scarcely saw her, for something glistened before his sight and fell at last upon her hand. It seemed to fall upon her heart with untold

misery. It was the first tear she had ever brought to those dear eyes, and she was frightened at it."

"She knows what you went to the village about, so you need not be trying to hide it, father," said Mrs. M'Dermott.

"Well, since she does," he replied, pressing her closer to him, "let me tell her that I have made some of our friends regret interfering with my property. The village attorney—not poor Charley Rochfort, I wish it were—the village attorney says I have a good case—an action against the O'Donnells, and will be sure to make them pay heavy damages. But here is Moila. What has she got? Mulled wine, and no end of good things. What a thoughtful puss to have such fine cheer for her hungry old father at this hour!"

"Indeed, it is not for you, sir," returned Moila, innocently, as she laid down the tray. But on looking more keenly at the faces before her, she came to the conclusion that Mrs. O'Donnell's letter had been shown, and that her father had assumed his usual cheerful manner to re-assure her. However, she made no comment, and was about to hand the pre-

scribed beverage to Dorina, when a knock came to the hall-door, and in a moment after a respectable-looking man made his appearance among them.

"Steward Doherty—glad to see you," said the farmer, with bluff hospitality.

"Steward no longer, sir; but all the same I thank you for the greeting."

"Why, Doherty, what do you mean by steward no longer?"

"Simply that I am discharged. For forty years I kept the property of the Desmonds without a blemish in my accounts; and now, without a notice or any reason, I am told that a quarter's salary will suffice for both."

"Sit down, sit down, man. You do not mean to tell me that the stewardship of Castlethomond—?"

"Is transferred to another person."

"It seems impossible: you who old Mr. Desmond, and Mr. Walter after him, trusted as they would have trusted me or any other honest man. I will go to Mr. Erroll at once about it; his tenantry will have no other agent."

"You cannot see him; Mr. Erroll has left the Castle."

"Left the Castle?"

It was not the farmer alone who ejaculated those three words, but every one present. It was a strange picture, the old steward seated, the little group standing round him, amazed, anxious, and indignant at his wrongs; Dorina crouching behind the others with a look of terror in her face, and her hands working nervously by her side. But no one saw her, each was so engaged with what Doherty had to say.

"Where has he gone to?" at last asked the farmer.

"No one knows; he went about an hour ago. But before starting he gave me my dismissal and this purse."

"Who is to fill your place?"

"John Tyrrell."

"Then Heaven help the man who has not his rent when due."

"Mr. Erroll may soon be back, and regret his haste in treating you like this," remarked Mrs. M'Dermott.

"He is not a man to regret an injustice, ma'am."

"But did he leave no message, no commands for the servants?"

"Yes, the Castle is to beshut up, that is all."

CHAPTER XXIV.

FORETELLING HER FATE.

AFTER a fortnight, a letter arrived from abroad,—a letter from Miss Sarsfield. It was quite an event at the farm; every one wanted to read it at once. However, Dorina, asserting the right of proprietorship, it being addressed to her, read it aloud. It did not contain much news, for the sorrow of the writer's heart coloured all its contents, and threw a shadow over even her brightest description of places she had seen. Mildred dwelt more on Mrs. Desmond's health than on the beauties of foreign scenery.

"It is sad, yet beautiful," she wrote, "to see the resignation with which she bears her suffering; in the midst of the extremest agony she is patient and calm as any martyr; indeed, I do not think there is a truer Chris-

tian on earth than Mrs. Desmond: but one thing I cannot understand—she is never more cheerful than on the days she suffers most. When I questioned her about it, she said, ‘Because, my dear, the more the body goes through, the nearer the soul is to peace.’ I was startled, for it is a faith I do not believe in; but she explained by saying, ‘I mean, Milly, that the body, like a piece of machinery, being so terribly out of order, will soon break up altogether—in a word, the shorter that life is for me the better I shall like it.’ I know her sufferings are hard to bear, and that since the dreadful night of the harvest-home her health is worse than ever; but then she has other ties, and Lynmore is the dearest. As for me, I positively adore my Walter’s mother; but she does not reciprocate the feeling, for, hide it as she may, I fear she will never be able to conquer her prejudice against me. You saw it display itself more than once, Dorina. Why is this, I wonder?”

Another part of Mildred’s letter ran thus:—

“Lynmore is making my dear uncle young again, for by some extraordinary magnetism of sympathy he infuses his own enthusiasm

into his noble old heart. Sir Capel became as inspired as a poet from the day after our arrival, and is as wild with admiration of the wonderful scenery here as Lynmore is himself; they are collecting some fine water-colour sketches for you. It was amusing to see them ascending Mont Blanc. My uncle's appreciation of all he beheld was even warmer than my brother's,—by my brother, I mean Lynmore, of course, for he is so in affection and kindness to me, poor Walter's widowed bride."

Here the letter broke off abruptly, and simply ended with a regret that it would be useless for Dorina to write in reply, as they would be constantly on the move.

"Think of Miss Milly ascending Mont Blanc, and never saying a word more about it," said Dorina, folding up the letter with an air of disappointment; "she who would rave about the view from Clonshavale, and sketch our little hills of Clare with so much pleasure."

"Her heart is breaking for the dead," murmured Moila.

"But to go up Mont Blanc is almost as good as ascending a throne. 'Monarch of all

I survey.' My goodness, if I got the chance, I would be like Napoleon, fancy myself born to be the conqueror of the world."

"And most likely your ambitious fancy would come to the same termination as poor Napoleon's did. But, dear me, I am so glad Sir Capel is enjoying the trip; that is the summit of Miss Sarsfield's ambition now, I think."

Dorina, abashed by her sister's covert rebuke, said humbly,—

"And she is right, for those are the best people in the world who live in their affections. Love is everything to them—their anchor, their haven, their ambition. The woman who sees through her heart can scarcely detect a flaw in the object of her devotion: she is content and happy in her household treasures, and cares for nothing else. But the woman who tramples out those best feelings of her nature, who listens only to the promptings of vanity, power, wealth—in a word, who obeys only ambition, she is lost—lost to happiness, and to everything that is good and holy. Her love is scattered to the winds, silenced, but never altogether crushed out; she becomes a restless

and discontented being, weary of the aching void in her nature; she grows heart-hungry, and, oh! so wretched."

"Dorina!" Moila was standing at her elbow looking keenly at her. "I thought you did not love him?" she continued. "You told me so. You are mistaken though; you do love him."

"Not I, indeed; if it be Lynmore you mean, he is nothing to me, my little trembler." Dorina laughed as she said this, and tripped out of the room. In a moment afterwards she had her white arms covered with flour, experimenting on a new style of pudding.

Not half satisfied with the turn affairs had taken, Moila followed her, and stood looking at the dimpled hands pattering about in the dough.

"It is so seldom this fancy takes me, that I do not wonder you should smile, Moila,—which, by the way, you are not doing; though one should be useful as well as ornamental, you know." Here she thumped the dough down on the slab, and began shaking the flour through her fingers. "Now, I suppose," she added, "if Lynmore saw this

thing on my hands he would say it was scattered leaves of jessamine to tender snow-flakes clinging, or some other folly like that. What nonsense those young fellows talk about, to be sure. Romance can be defined by saying that snow-flakes and jessamine can appear at the same time; there is as much truth in one as in the other; it is all false—utter humbug.”

“You are saying what you do not believe. There can be very little refinement without romance, and *vice versâ*. What has vexed you, dear? Anything in Miss Milly’s letter?”

“You read it yourself.”

“You are cross all day. I saw you could have almost said something to insult Mr. Tyrrell when he came about the draining, and proposed to make a public path through the field to the glen.”

“I hate the man.”

“Well, none of us like him; he is too domineering to please the tenantry, that is certain, and every one regrets poor old Doherty.”

“Dear old honest fellow. Tyrrell is a rogue.”

“You have never found him to be one; he

has never yet avowed himself in that capacity, thank goodness."

"Do you like him, Moila? But I know you hate him, although it is against your principle to acknowledge it. Is not that the fact?"

"Something near it. I do wish old Doherty was installed again."

"You will not see that for some time, my dear; but it will come."

"How can you tell? If Mr. Erroll wishes to retain his new steward, and if the business be done as accurately as formerly, of course poor Doherty will have no chance."

"There you are mistaken."

"I cannot see it. Mr. Desmond's will is law."

"But when Mrs. Desmond's will shall counterbalance it?"

"Dear old lady; she little cares about such things."

"But the dear young lady may alter matters materially. I told you I meant to reign at Castlethomond, and you shall see me doing so. Smile as you like, and shake your head as incredulously as you can, in spite of these dumb negatives, I am quite sanguine about it."

"You have not seen Mr. Desmond for the last two weeks, thank goodness. We do not even know where he is."

"Granted; but what of that?"

"Please, miss, the oven is hot," chimed in the servant.

"Puddings do not want ovens. Here, finish this yourself." And Dorina, throwing aside the ingredients, plunged her hands into cold water, and walked off, very unlike a pastrycook.

She encountered Toby Downs at the door; then her manner changed, and she was again the farmer's humble daughter; for, with all her pride fallen from her, like a useless armour, she laid her hand on Toby's, and peered anxiously into his face. It was averted, and knowing what that meant, she turned away with a sigh.

"What I wouldn't let you believe this morning, miss," he said, "I bid you not only believe now, but to be prepared for. Mr. Erroll isn't far off, and doesn't let the grass grow under his feet in doing what he said he would do."

She took his hand—that bony, awkward appendage,—and pressed it between her own.

Then, for the moment, the foundling seemed the stronger-minded of the two; but she was soon herself again; and, with her usual tact, managed to allay Moila's curiosity by allaying her suspicion.

CHAPTER XXV.

A RETROSPECT.

THE morning on which Dorina left the house with Mrs. O'Donnell's letter lying like a snake in her pocket, she had a foreboding that the meal then partaken of would be the last that should be enjoyed at Rosmary in peace and happiness; and the foreboding was true, for the shadows which she would fain keep off were gathering near and nearer. A reserve fell on every member of the family, as if each were seeking to keep some anxious thought from the other. The cloud of care had come upon each brow around the humble board, but she could not avert the evil, although she had been its principal cause. She was compelled to stay quietly and watch the darkness thicken until the moment came for her to act.

It was a weary time, that time of dread suspense; yet it was comparative happiness

to what Dorina expected, and what was coming. The peace of that little circle was very dear to her, and the first discord in its harmony grated painfully upon her heart. She had seen many friends fall away, and watched her sister droop beneath the calumny of their enemies; for, like a sensitive plant touched too roughly, the Sweet Rose of the Vale shrank within herself and faded daily. The breath of slander had passed over her young life, and blighted the dearest hopes of her existence, yet Dorina was powerless to shield her.

A pleasant surprise awaited them at last; and it is only those whose pleasures are few can enter into their feelings now, for that pleasant surprise was merely a visit from a friend.

It was about a week after the receipt of Milly's letter that, on their return from a walk, they found Kathleen and Mrs. Rochfort chatting as familiarly as ever with their parents in the cosy little parlour. The girls sprang into each other's arms. There was faith and love and trust in the embrace; but it was too much for Moila, who sank on the nearest chair and burst into tears.

It appeared such an age since she had seen Charley's sister, and her presence now was like an assurance that nothing evil was believed in that quarter. Surely, then, if Moila cried passionately, it was a pardonable weakness, for she had felt the loss of friendship. She had missed the companionship of her own sex, and shrank at the stand-alooof look of those who used to love her.

"She just walked too far and is over-tired, so let her have her cry out," said the experienced Mrs. Rochfort, signing to the others to take no further notice; and the cry was soon finished, for Kathleen's presence raised Moila to her own self-esteem, and made her happy.

The young people chatted gaily near the window by themselves—they had so much to say to each other, so many questions to ask, and Kathleen had so many funny bits of gossip to unfold, of course carefully avoiding all mention of Lizzy O'Connor, or any other unpleasant subject.

How Moila longed to ask about the one individual who made her *all*; but her heart throbbed so wildly when she thought of him, and it made the hot blood tingle so unplea-

santly on her cheeks, that she had to turn her eyes away from his sister, fearing she should find out what was in her mind. But Kathleen was a good-natured girl, and it is wonderful how much happiness good-natured girls can impart; for, drawing Moila's ear close to her lips, she whispered something like what a peculiar kind of shell is said to whisper—a message from the sea.

Dorina listened for some time with interest to all Miss Rochfort had to say about her brother, but gradually she grew inattentive, and almost held her breath, to hear the conversation that was going on by the fireplace.

“The new steward over-rates his power, and forgets that Irish blood brooks no tyranny,” she heard her father say.

“If Mrs. Desmond and Mr. Lynmore were once home, the evil would be rectified, for with all Mr. Erroll's faults, he loves his mother dearly. But from what I learn, I fear the poor lady will never see Castlethomond again, and that when she does return, it will be to take her place in the family vault,” said Mrs. Rochfort, sadly.

“The poor would lose a benefactress then, and every tenant a true friend. Never-

was a lady more deservedly beloved, and never will one be so bitterly regretted. She is not an old woman either, not near my age, for she was a growing young girl when I was married. You know, Mrs. Rochfort, I was a wife a good while before I became a mother. The time that Mrs. Desmond came to the Castle a bride, she was not more than nineteen years of age; and such a beauty was never seen within its walls, never except one, and that one was her sister, Miss Edith Chatterton."

Mrs. M'Dermott paused to recover breath, for she had spoken fast, as though following the train of memory. Then she resumed more quietly,—

"Since that time Mrs. Desmond was the idol of us all; from the oldest to the youngest, every one adored her. I remember, when poor Mr. Walter was born,—for I was up at the Castle then as much as I could be spared from Rosmary, as there were many ways in which I made myself useful up there,—never shall I forget her playing with her pretty baby, and laughing so that the old house rang with its music. Every one loved that laugh of hers, and her winning ways; even

the servants would linger about the doors to see her toss up the chubby infant, and catch him to her heart again, as though he were a little God to be worshipped. She was a bright and joyous creature then, and her husband had no dearer thought than her and his boy. Never did I see a man more devoted than was Mr. Desmond. And why not? for never was woman more lovely, more bright and happy, than that young wife, always excepting one—Miss Edith.

“It was in the midst of this happiness that Miss Edith Chatterton came to the Castle. We had all thought that Mrs. Desmond was the loveliest woman in the world, but her sister threw her in the shade—the country went mad about her: at balls, *fêtes*, and every other fashionable gathering, Miss Chatterton was the belle, the reigning queen of grace and beauty. But she was not at the Castle much more than twelve months, when there came a change over her that surprised us all,—the sweet girl seemed to pine and sicken, a blight fell upon her, all her joyousness vanished, and a strange unrest came in its place. Mrs. Desmond, too, at this time became much altered; but no one

wondered at that, as it depended upon her situation. Thinking, I suppose, that change of air and scene would be beneficial to both the ladies, Mr. Desmond took them abroad ; but Miss Edith never returned."

"She died there," said Mrs. Rochfort, sadly. "I remember all about it, poor young thing ; and the many hearts she left here to mourn her early fate."

"Yes, and hearts that never forgot her," added Mrs. M'Dermott. "Ah ! but it was a sad time at the Castle when Mr. and Mrs. Desmond returned with their twin-born infants ; even the sweet little things had no power to cheer the young mother, who was mourning for the sister she had left in a foreign grave."

"Poor Miss Edith," murmured the farmer ; "she came among us like a bright and happy dream, and like it she vanished, leaving nothing but a sweet memory behind her."

"I believe it was a long time before Mrs. Desmond recovered her cheerfulness?" remarked Mrs. Rochfort.

"She never recovered it," returned Mrs. M'Dermott ; "at least, not entirely ; but I think that was principally owing to ill health,

for since the twins were born she has been miserably delicate, as we all know."

"She always made a great difference in her affection for them. Little Miss Emma was the pet, but master Erroll was the beauty."

"You could scarcely wonder at that preference, as she was always wishing for a baby daughter, and to this day I think she loves Mrs. Laffere better than either Mr. Erroll or Mr. Lynmore—in fact, loves her better than even she did poor Mr. Walter."

"Quite natural; my Kathleen is dearer to me than even my Charley; and yet, God bless the boy, it is hard to choose between them. But surely I heard something about Miss Chatterton being engaged to some great nobleman, and that it was some trouble about him which first brought on her illness?"

"That I cannot say; like you, I heard about the engagement, but I never believed a word of it; the beginning of that illness was always a kind of mystery to me."

"How so, did it come on suddenly?"

"Well, perhaps I should not exactly say the beginning, but it was certainly the beginning of the severe stage of it."

“What was mysterious about it?”

“It was scarcely a week before they went abroad. I was later than usual at the Castle that night, and it was nearly midnight, when Mrs. Desmond sent me to the library on some trifling message,—I forget what now, for the scene I witnessed then put everything else out of my mind. When I entered the room, Mr. Desmond was standing on the hearth-rug with his arms folded on his breast, and scowling sternly at a man who sat with his face buried in his hands, and his whole body shaking convulsively. On a sofa, a little apart from both, Miss Edith was sitting bolt upright, with features set in rigid stillness, and the expression they bore was one of either intense fright or horror. I flew to her, and caught her in my arms. She screamed,—oh! such a scream of anguish never came from mortal lips before: it terrified the gentlemen, and brought Mrs. Desmond flying to us in alarm. No one knew what ailed her: her gestures and manner became wild and incoherent; she raved about something the gentlemen had been saying, but I could not catch her words; and when Dr. Ernest saw her, he said it

was the confirmation of a disease he had been dreading for her."

"Poor dear, poor dear; and what was that?" asked the sympathetic Mrs. Rochfort, wiping her eyes.

"Madness, melancholy madness. Ah! I understood then why she had been moping about the Castle like a ghost. Poor Miss Edith! no one more bitterly regretted her sad fate than me."

"Perhaps something passed between the gentlemen that annoyed her."

"I do not think it possible; they both loved her too dearly to say anything in her presence that would do so."

"Who was the man Mr. Desmond was scowling at as you entered the library?"

"Sir Capel Sarsfield."

CHAPTER XXVI.

READING HER FATE IN THE FIRE-PICTURES.

DORINA listened to every word that was uttered near the fireplace with the keenest interest, and it was her father's voice breaking in upon her mother's treble tones that made her conscious at last of not even appearing to notice that Kathleen Rochfort was taking great pains to explain the intricacies of the latest crochet pattern, which had appeared in the *Ladies' Journal*, and to which industrious Lizzy was a subscriber; she turned her face around and took the cotton in her hand, then mechanically passed it on to Moila, and, while seeming to watch her nimble fingers, sent her mind to the fireplace more greedily than before.

She heard her father remonstrate with Mrs. Rochfort for allowing her wine to "turn into

vinegar," then saw him take his pipe and begin to smoke, as though determined not to interfere with the woman any farther. For him the world might wag now as it liked; he had his pipe, and he cared for no one.

"Yes," continued Mrs. M'Dermott, "it was Sir Capel Sarsfield, sure enough, although his nearest friend might have failed to recognize him at that moment, for I never saw so haggard a face as his in all my days."

"But poor Miss Edith; what happened after?" asked Mrs. Rochfort, eagerly.

"We took her to her room, and stayed with her all night."

"Was she really mad, then, as Dr. Ernest said?"

"I cannot say, for I never saw any one affected like her before; her eyes were wild, her face was ghastly, her teeth chattered together, and all the warmth we could devise failed to suffuse heat through her system."

"Sir Capel must have brought some terrible news to the Castle. Was Miss Mildred at Clonshavale then—as a child, I mean?"

"Of course not; sure you know all this happened years before Miss Milly was born."

"True, true, I forgot that."

"And as for Sir Capel, he was so much attached to the Desmonds that he would have bitten off his tongue before he would say anything to vex them."

"So I have heard; in fact, people said that he was over head and ears in love with Mrs. Desmond."

"A word of which I could not believe; Sir Capel was too honourable for that."

"Still the husband and he had some disagreement."

"I never said so."

"But it was evident that something caused him to scowl at Sir Capel when you entered the room."

"Granted, but it could be nothing of that kind, for they were more intimate than ever afterwards."

Mrs. Rochfort remained silent for awhile, then looked up suddenly and gave expression to her thoughts.

"I wonder why Sir Capel never married?"

"It would be hard to say, and it is a pity that he did not, for some one woman in the world missed a good husband."

Dorina could bear the subdued chatter of Kate and Moila no longer, and when they

were so engrossed with the crochet as not to miss her, she slipped away, and, as she took a seat quietly beside her mother, she came to a conclusion.

"This, then," she thought, "is the woman he had kissed beside Miss Milly and myself,—he loved Mrs. Desmond." Then the interview which passed between Sir Capel and herself on the last night she spent at Clonshavale rushed vividly into her mind, and she longed to hear more of the love affair that had then roused her interest; but she was not likely to be gratified just now, for her mother passed lightly from the theme.

"Sorrow is not confined to one particular class, that is certain," she said; "but I do not know any one who has gone through so much of it as poor Mrs. Desmond did. She always had the sympathy of high and simple, if that would do her any good, for from the first we all missed the bright young creature who would be bright and glad no more."

"And did she never recover her health or spirits since her sister's death, poor lamb?"

"She did for about two or three months after Mr. Lynmore was born; then she relapsed again, or rather grew rapidly worse,

until she became, as she is now, a confirmed invalid."

"Did you ever learn what Sir Capel had come that night to the Castle about?" asked Mrs. Rochfort, evidently unable to fix her mind on any other subject.

"No, I heard no more about it; but there could not have been a quarrel, or anything even bordering on one, for the two men were more like brothers after that than ever—indeed, they had been so all their lives; but after that night they were inseparable. But what brought round all this talk about the Desmonds?"

"I think it was by your husband saying that Mr. Tyrrell was a tyrant, and that if Mrs. Desmond were home matters would be different."

"Yes, that was it. So Tyrrell has threatened to distrain poor farmer Brady for his rent, because it was not forthcoming on last pay day. Poor body! things have gone wrong with him somehow; however, he has friends who will not see him turned out of house and home for all the black-hearted stewards in Europe."

"Right," said M'Dermott, waking up from

a doze, and shaking the ashes out of his pipe. "And it's my opinion that Tyrrell will get a bullet through his brains if he does not mind what he is about. I am quite sure that even Mr. Erroll would not allow one of his tenants to be treated so shabbily. The new agent is outstepping his authority. But, look ! speak of the d—l and he will appear, for if my eyes tell truth, here he comes across the fields."

Every one looked in the direction indicated by the farmer, and saw a middle-aged man walking slowly towards the house ; his frieze coat was buttoned over his chest, and he carried a thorn stick in his hand. He was a tall, wiry-looking individual, and repellent in appearance, even at the distance they were looking from.

"What can bring him here now ?" asked M'Dermott. But there was no reply ; for, of course, no one knew : all kept watching his approach—all except Dorina, who had started violently when her father said that Tyrrell was coming, and had turned her face towards the fire, as though determined not to look at him further than the one glance which shot swiftly over the field. Then the colour forsook

her face, her very lips grew white, and every feature of the young countenance grew pinched and worn; but those present were too much occupied to notice her.

It was curious to see her seated by the fireside gazing with distended pupils at the glowing coals, as if reading her fate in the pictures there. Her lips were parted, and she seemed to gasp rather than to breathe; her fingers were clutching nervously at the arm of her mother's chair. And when she withdrew her eyes at all, it was to turn them wistfully upon the faded chintz that covered it; then she patted the cushion as fondly as if it had life and sense to know why she did so. She listened for the steward's approach, for the first footstep on the gravel walk, and when it came, she caught the pillow she had been fondling, and kissed it passionately. Then she listened again—nearer and still nearer came the measured fall. Surely the man's feet were treading on her heart, for when the gravel crunched beneath them, she shrank and winced as though in pain.

Never was such listening as Dorina's—every nerve in her body was strung to the highest tension; and she counted each step

with keener anxiety, as though the last would snap the fibres of her heart asunder.

"We must go home now, Kathleen, dear," said Mrs. Rochfort, with that intuitive delicacy which usually characterizes the Irish, for she naturally thought the steward had come about some business which would be more comfortably transacted in her absence; but Mrs. M'Dermott would not hear of their departure, and a hot luncheon making its appearance on the moment, obliged them to remain.

Through all the noise and chatter occasioned by the hospitable little dispute, Dorina heard the steward's footstep drawing nearer. She was conscious of nothing else, although the others were taking their places round the table, forgetful now almost of his existence. No one looked towards her—no one knew that she was counting the paces over the gravel walk until Tyrrell mounted the steps, and there was a pause; then her hands were pressed tightly together, and a cold moisture broke over her brow. The knock came at last; and, starting up, she turned and faced the door.

"It is the steward, so let him walk in

here if you have no objection," said M'Dermott.

No objection being raised, Tyrrell was ushered into the parlour, and was welcomed amongst them. His Satanic Majesty would have been welcome to Rosmary if he came in the guise of a guest, and would have been treated with hospitality in every other Irish homestead likewise. Tyrrell was received with the customary kindness, and, although not invited to the table, even in the good old style of sitting below the salt, he was offered refreshments, which he declined, and to decline such was an offence bordering on an insult.

"Then drink, man," said the farmer, testily.

The steward obeyed, but in a surly manner, which increased M'Dermott's displeasure. Native politeness, however, obliged him to curb his temper, by remembering that his guest was sacred; so he held his peace.

"I never like to take a man's good liquor when I have an ugly dooty to perform," at last spoke out Tyrrell.

"From all accounts custom should have

case-hardened you by this time," put in Mrs. Rochfort, snappishly.

"Thanks to you for your good opinion, ma'am; it is only those who do not live in glass houses who can throw stones with safety. But I did not come here for any angry dispute, although I fear that some bitter things will be said before I leave."

"Out with it, then, Tyrrell; go on with your ugly duty, whatever it may be; for when an unpleasant business is to be got over, the sooner it is set about the better," said the farmer.

"Well, the first thing for me to say is, that there is a very particular person, one whom you take an interest in, and that very particular person is—dead, sir."

"Hang you, I know no one whom I care a fig about outside my own family."

"Except," said Moila, uneasily, "except—Oh! Mr. Tyrrell, you do not mean to tell us that it is Mrs. Desmond?"

"No, no, the other is of much more importance to your father,—indeed, of vital importance to yourself, and to all the family, for that matter."

Tyrrell rose and stood nearer the door,

twirling about his stick, and tapping the leaden top every now and then lightly over the palm of his hand, but remained silent for a moment.

“Who is dead? Why don’t you speak out, man?” asked M’Dermott.

“Mr. Everett.”

The farmer leaped from his chair, and the two men glared at each other in defiance.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PROOFS.

"THIS is sad and sudden news," said Mrs. M'Dermott, going to her husband's side, "and from Tyrrell's manner it is plain that some mischief is intended; but bear up like a brave fellow, George, and let them not take your rights without a struggle."

"If there be mischief intended, ma'am," said the steward, "it is not of my making; I am but a servant, and must do my dooty." Bowing obsequiously, he moved the stick up under his arm, and rubbed his hands together, as if he liked that duty.

"Who sent you to tell me about this death?" asked M'Dermott, stroking his wife's grey hair fondly with his fingers.

"Mr. Erroll."

"'Tis false,—a Desmond would not soil his conscience with such a dirty trick."

"Nevertheless it was he; that I swear. But as for me, I will deal as leniently with you as I can."

"I care not for your leniency. Where is Mr. Erroll now?"

"I cannot say; he left the Castle more than a month ago."

"Was it by letter, then, that you received instructions to inform me of Mr. Everett's death?"

"No, he came to me about it."

"When?"

"Four or five nights since."

"Although you say he left the Castle more than a month ago. How is this? But no matter. Do you know who Mr. Everett was?"

"Yes, my master told me then."

"He told you that the lease of Rosmary Farm was depending on his life, and that that life was gone."

Every one present now comprehended the scene that was passing before them, and understood the terrible position of M'Dermott. Moila crept to her mother's side, but Dorina retained her place upon the hearth apparently unmoved,—it was what she had long expected.

"I am sorry that you did not see to this before," said Tyrrell.

"You know nothing about it," said the farmer, sharply. "The lease was depending on two lives. One dropped off at our last harvest-home. I saw poor master Walter dead myself. Ah! I was safe while he and his father lived. But Mr. Erroll is a scoundrel, and the only one of the Desmonds who would take advantage of a man who trusted him. Yet it was not him I trusted, for I meant to have the lease made right as soon as the grief of the family had passed off a little."

"It was wrong to defer it."

"Yes, now I see it was. But who could speak of a thing like that while every one was mourning for master Walter's loss?"

Dorina watched her father and Tyrrell alternately, devouring every word they uttered, and impatiently turning her head at any interruption.

"Aye, that was a loss to be lamented, sure enough, and one to be felt by every one as well as you," said Mrs. Rochfort, solemnly.

"What does Tyrrell intend to do about the lease?" whispered Moila, turning to Kathleen, who stood tearfully beside her.

"You will find out directly, dear; but, never fear, look at Dorina."

Moila did so in surprise.

"Never fear," resumed her friend; "she has a counter-plot for Erroll's work. You need not tremble. All will be right in the end, or my name is not Kathleen."

"How stern she looks, yet how calm and lovely!"

"Beautiful! Do you remember the statuary at the Castle? Did you not see many beautiful faces there on which determination was stamped? There it is again on hers, as plain as plain can be."

Moila left her friend, and placed her hand upon her sister's.

"Do not interrupt me, darling," said Dorina, knowing whose touch it was, without turning her head.

"Interrupt you? I did not speak."

"Hush! hush! Do you not hear what Tyrrell says?"

Dorina stepped forward now and confronted the steward.

"Where are the proofs of Mr. Everett's death?" she asked.

"Here, letters and papers in plenty. Look

at the announcement of it yourself in these two journals, and in a host of other papers besides. Here, also, is a letter to Mr. Erroll's lawyer, corroborating the fact; indeed, miss, I wish I had not those to show, for although your father is harsh to me—and who could blame him?—I am grieved that this hour should ever fall on Rosmary."

Dorina was engrossed too deeply with the papers and letters to hear this condolence.

"Where did Mr. Everett die?" she questioned.

"In Milan; he lived there for some time."

"Yes, I know. I remember Sir Capel telling me something about his brother meeting him there; but it is a good while since there was a letter from Mr. Sarsfield."

"This has nothing to do with the present business, except, indeed, to strengthen Tyrrell's case," said M'Dermott, angrily.

Dorina looked again minutely at the papers in her hand, and thought of nothing else, until her father added, in a whisper,—

"Do not be puzzling your brains about this matter, but try to coax your mother from the room."

She returned the papers, and obeyed her

father, as if nothing had passed between them more than what he had said aloud.

"Rosmary is all right, mother," she said, "and I think that we women had better leave the men to have it out between them."

"No, no; I will not stir from your father's presence."

The little dialogue between mother and daughter, although carried on in an undertone, was heard by Mrs. Rochfort, who again made a move to retire; but Mrs. M'Dermott said something about sympathy, and they remained. And if friendship or sympathy could have saved M'Dermott, no man could have been more secure in his position than he.

"You cannot dispute Mr. Erroll's authority," said Tyrrell; "that, of course, is undeniable."

The farmer looked anxiously towards his wife, as if hesitating whether he should say any more upon the subject while she was present; but her aspect assured him that she meant to keep her ground, and it was she who spoke the words that were hovering on his lips.

"If that be the fact, Mr. Tyrrell, what is your next move?"

"Why, of course, ma'am, you see this is my dooty, and very disagreeable things people have to do sometimes when they do their dooty."

"Yes, please let us hear what it is."

"Why, just ma'am, I came here to give you notice to quit by the 25th of March next. That will be a few months hence. My master did not say anything with regard to terms as to compensation, or that sort of thing. It can be arranged by-and-by. I think he wants to let Rosmary to other people at a higher rent."

"To quit Rosmary before the 25th of March!" repeated the farmer, dreamily, and heeding no more of Tyrrell's speech.

"It is hard lines, I know, but Mr. Desmond requires some of the land himself, as he wants to throw down those old cottages out yonder, and intends to take all he can get into his own demesne. Now that you understand all about it, I hope you will reconcile your mind to the fact. So, wishing you safe through your trouble, I will bid you good-day."

The steward bowed himself out; but scarcely had he left the room when he knocked against a man on the door-mat: it

was Toby Downs, who confronted him with a pugilistic gesture."

"Listening," ejaculated the steward.

"Ay, listening," repeated the foundling. "And as you came to give notice, take one now yourself—the day that the M'Dermotts are turned out o' Rosmary will shine upon your corpse; and they that comes to take their place 'ill be received with bullets through their skulls, no matter what their numbers. Rosmary belongs to the M'Dermotts by right and might; so remember what I tells you, Mr. Tyrrell."

For all answer Tyrrell raised the thorn-stick and struck its leaden head bang upon the floor: it was not meant for Toby's cranium, but as a warning of what it could do if put to it.

"To quit Rosmary before the 25th of March next!" repeated M'Dermott, as though he could not fully realize the meaning of the words.

"Yes, look the fact in the face, George; it may be beggary, but nothing worse."

"And what worse could there be. And yet there could. Thank God, I have health and strength, and I am not too old to work."

"It cannot be so bad as that, old friend,"

said Mrs. Rochfort. "Keep a good heart; there is sunshine 'neath the cloud; we all know that. Moila, get your father's desk; he can write to Mrs. Desmond at once, and her influence with her son will soon set this to rights."

"You forget that I do not know where the lady is at present; besides, it would be of no use,—she has neither influence or authority over Mr. Erroll. Leave Rosmary! Surely Desmond has some reason for thus acting."

M'Dermott looked round suspiciously at his daughters, but it was only his wife who shrank and quailed before him.

"Mary, what is it?" he asked.

She came forward, and, resting her hand timidly on his shoulder, said, "It is the first thing I have ever harboured in my breast that you did not know of. Forgive me, George. Dorina, darling, I must tell him now."

Mrs. Rochfort, taking her daughter's hand, here made another effort to withdraw, but was prevented by Mrs. M'Dermott saying,—

"If your friendship be not too severely taxed already, you will stay here until this is explained. You have been true friends up to this, and as true friends listen to what I

am going to tell my old man now. Why are we turned out of Rosmary, George? It is this—because your daughter would not sell herself to save our home.”

“How?—what do you mean?”

“Because Dorina would not become, what you and I would be ashamed to own her as—”

Even Mrs. M'Dermott stammered and blushed, utterly unable to explain herself more fully.

“Do I comprehend you? Did Erroll Desmond seek our ruin more terribly than he is doing now?”

“He did, he did.”

“And is this his revenge?”

“It is. You have read it all aright. Because our Dorah is good and true, he would drive us now to poverty and ruin.”

“Better both. Dorina, where are you?”

She flew into his outstretched arms; then, looking fiercely round, he added, “Now let Desmond do his worst.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SILENT WITNESS.

THE Rochforts parted from their friends with the warmest expression of affection and esteem, —not that it was at all necessary to express either, for neither could be doubted; but Kathleen was unable to tear herself away from the girls without saying how much she respected them. Then her mother, pressing Mrs. M'Dermott's hand, ventured to follow her example, and, despite all the railings that could be heard against the truth of friendship, this time it was sincere; for, in all the troubles that beset the path of the M'Dermotts, these two friends remained staunch and loyal to the end.

Her father's praise had been very sweet to Dorina, but it did not make her much the happier. A horrible restlessness possessed

her; and the moment the Rochforts had taken their departure, she flew up to her own room, and walked to and fro like a caged tigress.

"He has struck the blow at last," she muttered. "And, now, what is my first move?"

A gentle tap came to the door, and, calming her agitation as best she could, she admitted Moila.

"I came," said the Sweet Rose, timidly, "I came to ask your forgiveness for the last time. Ah! Dorah, if you knew how cruelly I have wronged you in my thoughts, you would not kiss me thus. Let me explain. You remember on Thursday morning, when you left the parlour, without showing father Mrs. O'Donnell's letter as you intended,—but you are impatient—."

"I cannot help it, dear. Well, tell me; I remember that morning, what about it?"

"I saw you turn down the path that led towards the abbey ruins."

"Yes; and you saw me meet Erroll Desmond there?"

"I did, and also that he handed you a paper."

"Yes; it was the account of Mr. Everett's death."

"That was the reason of your earnestness. Why did you shrink from him before that?"

There was no answer, except, indeed, the crimson on Dorina's face could be said to give one. Its reflection seemed to suffuse Moila's also; and she understood the silence, yet persisted further,—

"Why did you run back to him again in that distracted manner after he had replaced it in his pocket?"

"To implore his mercy. He had threatened our ruin, threatened to turn us out of Rosmary then, and I craved his pity."

Moila sat down and asked no more questions; it seemed to be Dorina's turn for that.

"Was Toby paid his wages for the last quarter, do you know, dear?"

"Yes, I think so. What a queer idea to come into your mind such a time as this."

"Have you any money about you?"

"Only a few pounds. Three, I think."

"Will you lend it to me? I will pay you honestly."

"Yes, and you need never pay me at all."

Moila went out to her own room, and returned immediately with the money.

"Thanks, darling; I see that you are

beginning to trust me at last. Why do you not ask me what I want these notes for?"

"Because I am not worthy of an answer from you."

"Never think more of that; if you suspected me you had every reason to do so, for appearances were against me. I should most likely have done the same towards you if Erroll Desmond were haunting you as he haunted me, and that I saw what passed between you as far as gestures and papers went, without being able to hear a word that was uttered on either side. And yet, Moila, looking on you thus, I never could believe that anything but truth and purity could find a place within your heart."

"I never can blame myself sufficiently for doubting you, Dorina. Even the terrible fact of us all being driven out of Rosmary seems not more hard to bear than my having so bitterly wronged you."

"But you will not do so any more? Promise me that, and let the past be forgotten."

"Ah! Dorina, I can promise that heartily, only forgive that injustice now. Can you, dear?"

"Here let me seal it,"—and Dorina kissed

her again tenderly. "Now to business. I want this money, and you must ask no questions, for you know those who do not ask questions can tell no tales. Is not that the old proverb? Something like it we used to write in our copy-books at school. How long ago that seems to be—ages. I feel it. Well, here are three pounds; then Toby's wages and my own savings. Now, will you befriend me still more?"

"Still more! Of course I shall, as much as it is in my power; but I am half frightened at your excitement. Cannot you say what it is about, and then I will do anything you tell me?"

"No; if you do not doubt me, you can trust me. I would do so to you blindly; for I would not ask to see your motives, Moila. Have you no faith in my love and honour?"

"I have. Try me."

"Come here, then, to the window. It is growing dark, but even so you can see out."

"I can. I see a tall figure leaning against the garden hedge. It is a man; our father, perhaps."

"No; it is Erroll Desmond. He is there to keep his word."

"An appointment?"

"Scarcely so much. He said he would be there at this hour to see if I had altered my mind after Tyrrell's visit."

"Alter your mind upon what subject? But I remember now, dear. Oh! to think that Lynmore's brother could act so vile a part!"

"Without such parts the play of life could not go on," said Dorina, bitterly. "How shocked you are; and I do not wonder, for I had no right to speak in such an absurd and frivolous strain. Now, Moila, you said you would trust me. Will you stand there and watch me meeting Erroll?"

"I will, if it be necessary that you should do so."

"It is essentially necessary. I want to teach him a lesson."

"Better have no more to do with him."

"That would be throwing up the game. I will bring him to his proper understanding by-and-by, the first step towards which is to let him see I have not changed my mind, and that I could better afford to leave Rosmary than—"

"Say no more, Dorina; but if I were in your place, I could not bear to look upon his face again."

"That would never do. The time will come when he will beg me to accept his name; and if I reject Castlethomond, it will be because I hate its master. But I will not do that; I will become his wife, if it were only to let him see that a shrew cannot be tamed when she hates the tamer."

"Dorina, Dorina, darling, think of the life of misery you are preparing for yourself."

But Dorina was gone. She joined Desmond, who rushed forward when she appeared; but she waved him back with her hand, and, standing out in the fading light, so that Moila could best see her, she spoke to him, and returned within the space of five minutes.

"Moila," she said, as she came again to her sister's side, "in case that anything more should come of this meeting, you can safely say that you were a witness to it."

"I can; and for once to prove my faith in you, I will not even ask what passed between you. Shall I put those notes into your purse?"

"Yes; and put the purse into the pocket of my warm tweed dress, as I shall wear it to-morrow. It is tea-time now, so see that mother has it as usual, and do not say a word about our leaving Rosmary. Be as cheerful as you can, my dear."

"Will you not come down, Dorina?"

"No; do not mind me. And yet, perhaps, they might think it strange if I do not. Yes, I will go down, if you come to me when it is ready."

According to promise Moila returned; but Dorina was not in the room, and, instantly going to the window, where she had watched her meeting Erroll, she now saw her standing in the same spot talking to a man. That the man was one and the same person, Moila had no doubt, and her anger against her sister knew no bounds. She blamed herself for having trusted her, and hated herself for being made her dupe.

To fling open the window, and confront them both, was her first impulse. But before she could do so, Dorina flew back to the house, and the man came more fully into the twilight: it was Toby Downs, their faithful servant; and never did Moila's heart more

bitterly reproach her than it did at that discovery.

She was always doubting and suspecting her sister; but after what had just occurred between them, her present want of trust was worse than all.

"I was asking Toby if he had received his wages," explained Dorina, "which he has; and the good old fellow says he has saved some odd shillings besides. I know you are bewildered about this money matter, Moila; but you will know what I want with it very soon. It is a good thing to be provided for a rainy day, you know. How is poor mother keeping up?"

"Wonderfully! She seems to think of nothing but to cheer and comfort father."

"And he?"

"Ah, he is miserable! His one thought is about leaving Rosmary."

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